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Preview: Shivers II
Tips: Red Alert
Master of Orion II
Syndicate Wars
Rama, Hind

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Myth

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No.76 March 1997

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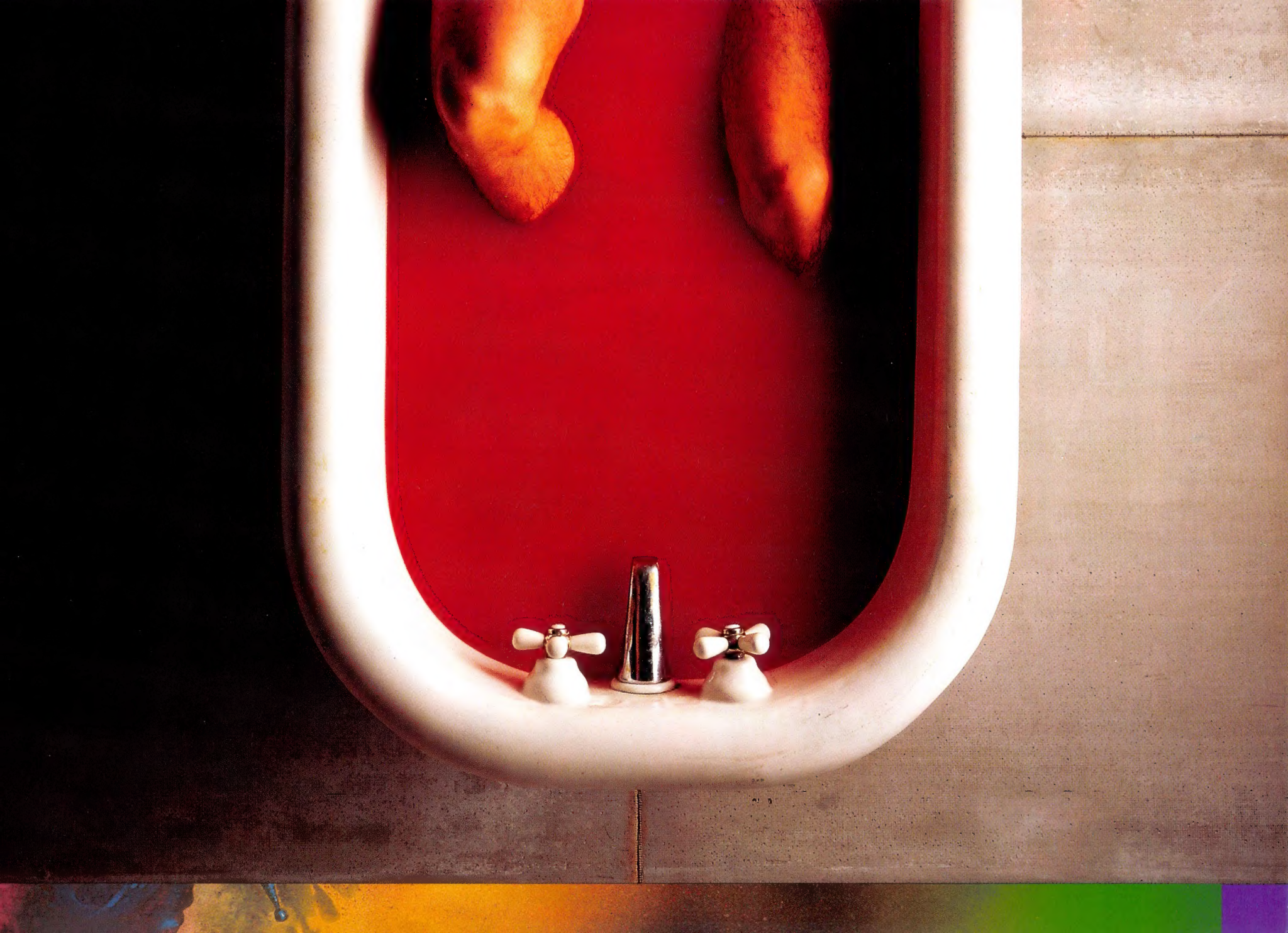

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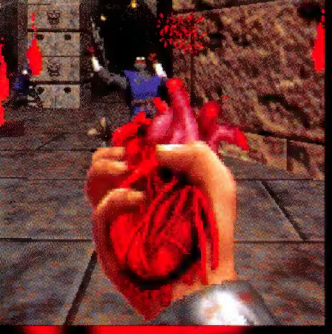

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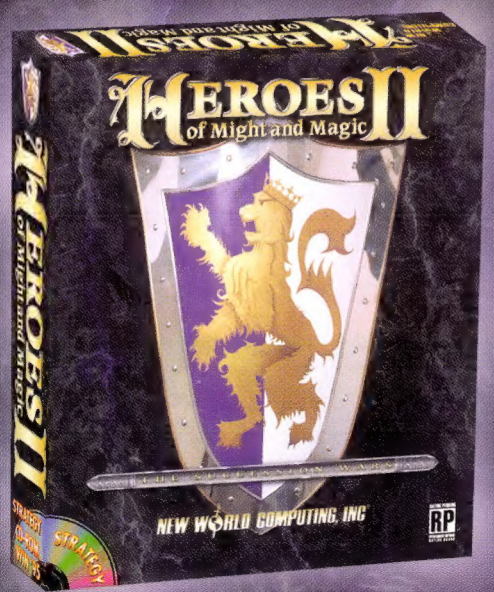

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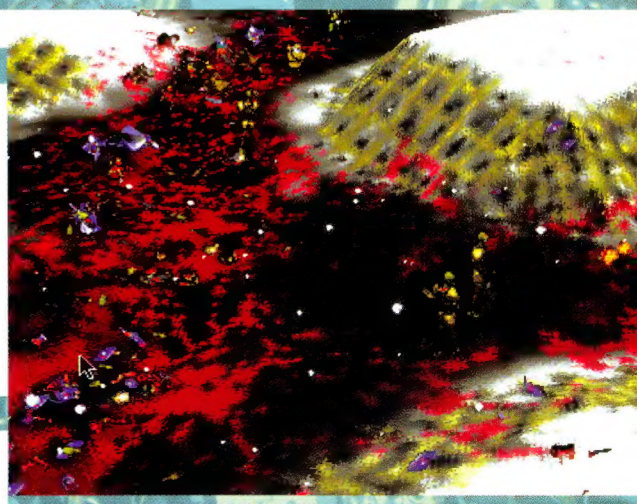

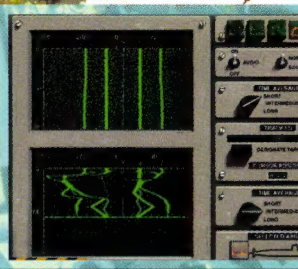

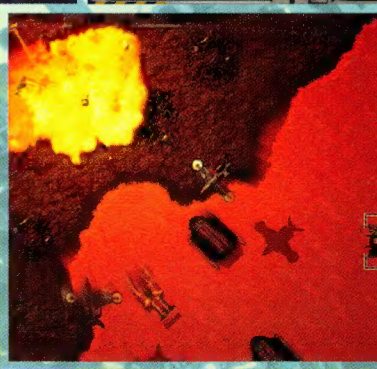

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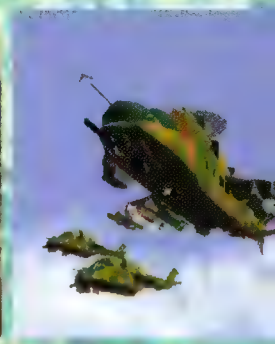

review ratings

Classic	★★★★★
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The Perfect Game

It's not a subject I usually broach here, simply because it's impossible to be broadly definitive on it, but here goes. One definition of the Perfect Game, circa 1997 (your mileage may vary, depending on your preferences):

I'm going to try to write this like an average dedicated gamer. First, I've got pretty spiffy hardware – I keep up with the trends in audio, video and control technology – so take for granted that your game can throw at me as much as the better-quality stuff out there can take: 166MHz Pentium, 3D card support, Dolby Surround sound, full dual (or more) joystick control.

Hot graphics are a must. They're not the be-all and end-all of gaming, certainly; I'm not going to be impressed with an empty visuals display, no matter how good. But you're missing the boat as far as I'm concerned if you're not making at least *some* use of motion video (in small, strategic doses, please), 3D graphics technology, SVGA resolutions, high-quality animation and impressive art work. There's a massive amount of talent out there in the visual arts, and they're all chomping at the bit to strut their stuff; if you're a publisher or producer, figure out a way to let 'em at it. I enjoy the best you can offer me along such lines, and you graphics designers and budding interactive movie-makers, know that I get a real kick out of seeing what you can do in this environment. Limit the scope of what you do, so you can make it excellent.

For the people groaning on about how graphics are taking over from game play, well, that's partly true, but on the other hand half of my enjoyment of *any* game I play comes directly from the style of presentation, and graphics and animation and video are all a fundamental part of that presentation now.

Right up there with visual presentation is interface. Be consistent, be clean, be considerate of my carpal tunnels and tendons, preferably be in Windows 95 now, especially when it comes to software installation and uninstallation. Make getting into (and out of) your game as easy as possible; I'm *damn* tired of having to struggle with interfaces, and I've had to do that all along, and I'm no dummy.

I have a PlayStation at home, too, so I know how good a game can sound; I know how much a good soundtrack, good sound effects, even good use of surround, can contribute to the experience and realism of a virtual environment. Go as far as you can here to make sound an actual element in the game design, and always, always think of it as more than the muzak soundtrack meant to keep the gamer's attention when nothing else will. Good sound hardware on a PC isn't hard to find now, either.

Anyone worried about how much space has been spent here already on graphics, sound and basic presentation? Those without the resources to compete with the production values of the best in this area should be. Don't think for a minute that – if the audience keeps pushing for it – you can't have professional visuals, a cracking interface, high quality sound and music *and* deep game play. The resources – human and technical – are out there for all of it.

Don't think if you dedicate multi-millions just to presentation that you're home free, of course; both the audience and the competition out there now mean two, challenging issues have to be faced by anyone producing a new game. First, you're playing to a sophisticated, varied, dedicated audience. As even the simplest online flame conversations will quickly prove, if there are holes in what you're doing, they *will* be found out, and legions will inhabit them, light fires and paint elaborate pictures on the walls. Producing a diverse, bug-free, integrated game design is a top priority now more than it's ever been.

The corollary to that is, you've got to *choose*. As a dedicated gamer I've seen everything, but be careful to remember that that doesn't mean I want to see everything all at once in each new game I pick up. I'm going to enjoy and respect and involve myself in those games where the designers have a clear *focus* in what they're doing, where my goals, options, interface, opportunities are all well-defined from the start, and enabled by every moment and every feature I'm encountering while I play. You can go deep if you are carefully selective about the scope of your design; a little, shallow bit of everything cobbled together is about as much fun as a point-and-click fest during an interlaced MPEG-1 B-movie on my 15" screen.

The Perfect Game's not hard to do, eh? It just takes time, and a massive coordination effort. It's out there, somewhere… I just know it. – *Steve Wartofsky, Editor*

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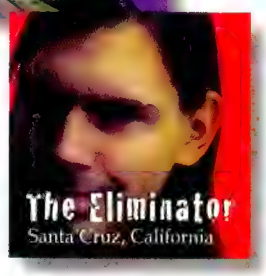

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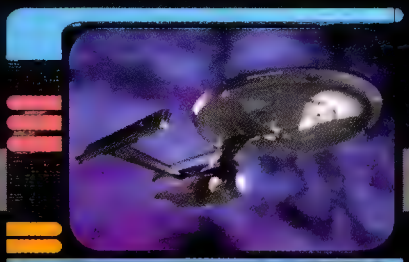

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Through the Looking Glass

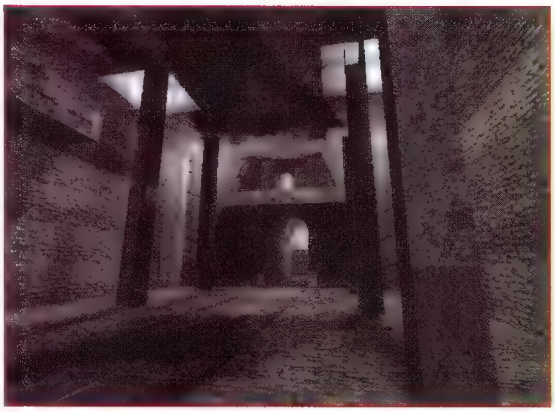
Flight Unlimited II takes flight – The Dark Project comes to light

FIRST LOOK WELL HEY HEY! LOOK who's back. Looking Glass Technologies has three exciting new projects underway, as various as they come.

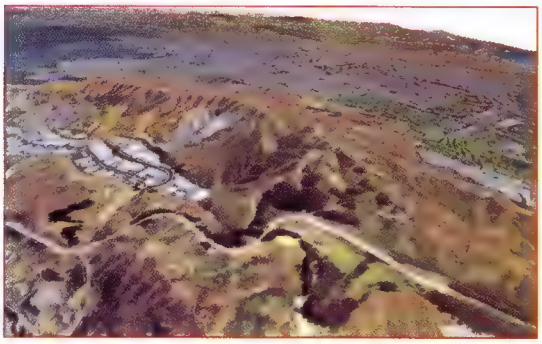
The Dark Project

Though they don't receive the credit they most certainly deserve, it was Looking Glass' *Ultima Underworld* (released by Origin) that pointed to the future of 3D gaming. Released around the time that id released *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Underworld* revolutionized the CRPG with its smooth-scrolling 3D world and immersive environment. It's popularity eclipsed even the standard *Ultima* series, and awed gamers with its 3D long before *Doom* emerged.

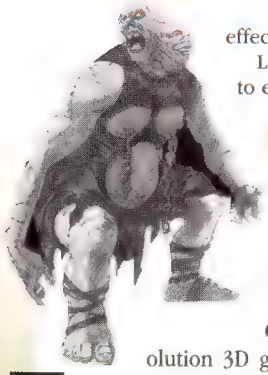
Looking Glass is now trying to re-revolutionize the genre with *The Dark Project*, a next-generation 3D CRPG headed up by Warren Spector, formerly of Origin, where he produced *Ultima Underworld I and II* and *System Shock*. According to Spector, *Dark* will "blow people away." Though details of the story and characters are sketchy (aside from the game's claim of "transporting players to a magical age"), the technology specs are already in place (of course). The 3D engine gives six-degrees of freedom, and will feature something called "Act/React" technology, which makes objects in the environment react intuitively. Look for sloping passageways, underwater tunnels and arching cathedrals. Full dynamic lighting and realistic water effects round out the features. Look for *The Dark Project* to emerge later this year.



The Dark Project, living up to its name. The drawings in the corners are preliminary art from this game as well



Flight Unlimited II, with new terrain technology



British Open Golf

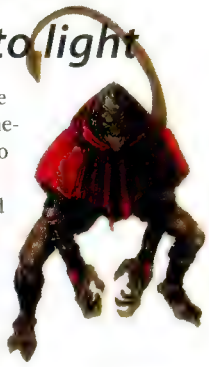
It's golf with an English accent as Looking Glass heads out to the green fields of St. Andrews and Royal Troon with *British Open Golf*. With high-resolution 3D graphics, realistic physics and weather effects, and caddies with oodles of AI, this is yet another golf game aiming for the crown held by *Links*.

The color commentary will be provided by the venerable Jim McKay of ABC Sports (if you've ever heard the legendary "the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat," while some hapless skier crashes, you've heard Jim). He's been yapping it up to produce over 5,000 audio soundbytes, which is 50 times more than most other golf games have (we've counted).

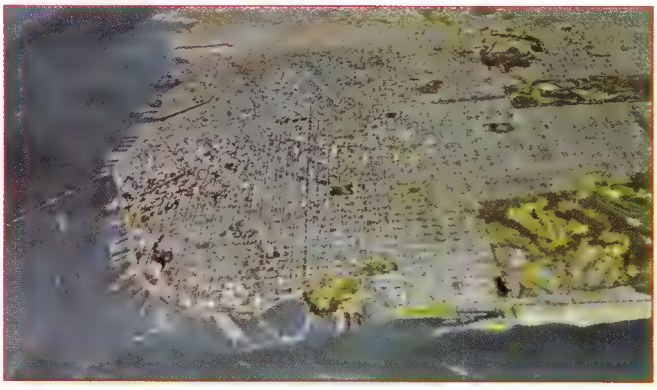
British Open Golf will be available for Windows 95 and the Macintosh in early 1997.

Flight Unlimited II

Some thought with *Flight Unlimited* project leader Seamus Blackley gone (but not out of the industry – turn the page and read about *The Lost World*), the *Flight Unlimited II* (working title) project might have come to a halt. Surprise! How about six new airplanes, 45 airports scattered across the San Francisco Bay Area (the prettiest place to fly over on Earth), full IFR instrument modeling, poor weather and visibility to practice IFR flight, 8500 square miles of scenery, and 25 planned adventures to give players something to do after they've retrieved their lower mandibles from the floor (the graphics are astounding)?



It looks like the *Flight Unlimited* project is anything but dead; if everything can be put together correctly by the mid-summer '97 planned release date, this could easily gain the title of top civilian flight sim of the year. The original *Flight Unlimited* remains not only the most visually consistent civilian flight sim out there, but also one of the most sophisticated in flight modeling. Prospects of such a major advance on the original are exciting indeed. – *Steve Wartofsky*



Flight Unlimited II, high above San Francisco. You can actually see numerous software companies from here (no, really)

The Dark Project, British Open Golf, Flight Unlimited II • *Looking Glass Technologies* • *Windows 95*

British Open Golf, obviously

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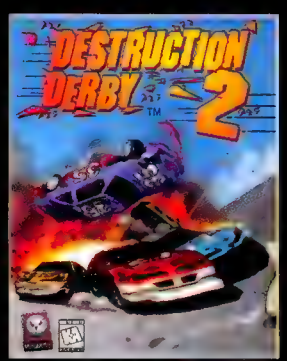

Destruction Derby™ 2 is the perfect combo of balls-to-the-wall racing and 3D wreckage. Seven new tracks are longer, wider, faster, plus four destruction bowls. Cars roll, cars flip, cars fly off the track. There's more deadly debris to deal with - tires, doors, hoods get jettisoned and serve as incoming missiles. There's all new fire, new explosions, and improved suspensions for more realistic handling. Destruction Derby 2. Designed exclusively for the true connoisseur of crash.

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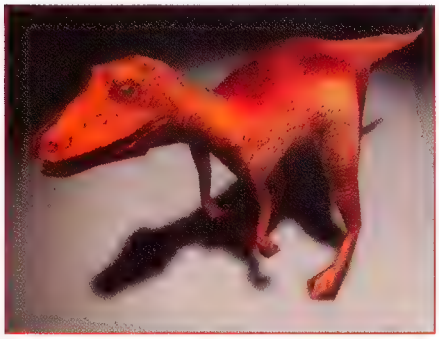
The Lost World

The game based on the movie based on the book

This is not your normal 3D terrain. If they can pull this sort of ground detail off in real-time, with a decent frame rate, the game version of the Lost World will be as technically impressive as the movie

FIRST LOOK HOW WOULD YOU feel if Steven Spielberg walked into your office and said, "Make a game of my movie?" If it were *Hook 2*, you'd be, well, off the hook. But if it's this little movie called *The Lost World*, which happens to be the sequel to a minor hit called *Jurassic Park*, then you might be a bit nervous. Scared even.

Not if you're Seamus Blackley, formerly of Looking Glass Technologies and *Flight Unlimited* fame. When asked if he was nervous, he just laughed. He's taking on the challenge and coming up with a bold, genre-bending game called, of course, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, a game which will combine the physics-based gameplay Blackley pioneered at Looking Glass with an open-ended 3D adventure. Or action game. Or something in between, one of those uncategorizable affairs that drives magazines to drink (because we have to classify the things).



Crunch a bunch of numbers and you too can map polygons on a dinosaur skeleton in real-time. Operators are standing by

Like *Flight Unlimited*, *The Lost World* features an amazing physics model (in keeping with Blackley's background in physics and as Looking Glass' resident mad scientist). For example, when asked about dinosaurs, he said there'd be a bunch of them on both the ground and in the air, and when a joke was made about turning the game into a dinosaur flight simulator, he all but said, "That's not out of the question." With everything modeled and possessing certain properties, it's not unreasonable to expect the unexpected.

The dinosaurs are polygon-based, but are built from skeletons. This "skeletal mapping," as it was described by Bullfrog's Peter Molyneux, isn't new, but Bullfrog was unable to integrate the technology into their games *Gene Wars* and *Dungeon Keeper*. When asked about what may have gone wrong with Bullfrog (it was suggested that perhaps they couldn't figure out a way to animate hundreds of onscreen figures at a time), Blackley said, "it all depends on the math." That math also applies to the 3D engine, which will features a number of solutions to the typical problems of detail and speed.

Look for dinosaurs to walk the earth in time for Christmas (Mr. Spielberg wants it that way). – *Steve Bauman*

The Lost World • *DreamWorks Interactive*

BRIEFS: Ch-ching – The sound of cash registers around the world brightened the holidays at Westwood Studios. It seems that *Command & Conquer: Red Alert* has sold-in a mind-numbing 1.5 million units worldwide in its first four weeks of release. For comparison, MicroProse has shipped over 725,000 units of *Civilization II* since March, and 750,000 of *Grand Prix II*. *Master of Orion II*, released at the same time as *Red Alert*, shipped over 200,000 units. What makes this even more interesting is that, contrary to popular belief, it's clear that it was not hurt by Westwood's decision not to release a demo version of the game (in fact, none of the above mentioned games have interactive demos).

The Journeyman Project 3

Time once again to re-enGage

FIRST LOOK NUMBER 5 IS ALIVE. *Agent* 5, that is...of the Temporal Security Agency. Just when you and your neural-net artificial intelligence chip advisor Arthur have managed to prove that you had not set out to alter Earth history in *Buried in Time* – Presto! It's time to play...the next stage of *The Journeyman Project*. Presto Studios is once again busy building the ensuing story of heroic agent Gage Blackwood.

Presto is also working on Pegasus Prime, a remake of Journeyman Project for the PlayStation and Macintosh-based Pippin

You as Gage have been directed to shut down TSA's time travel operations. Your friend Agent 3, Michelle Visard, had created such a scandal during *Buried in Time* due to her renegade activities that the powers that be find it best to discontinue all time travel at this juncture. Depressed and disgruntled, chin in hands, eyes drooping to the floor, you regret your inability to have located her. How could you have been so...Wait! Sirens? Alarms? After months and months of no information, Michelle has been detected in the timestream.

All of those nifty time-jumpsuits have been deactivated, so you don an untested prototype (and hate the color), and set out again into the timestream to try and apprehend the recreant Agent 3. But what you find is *not* what you bargained for. Something is threatening the survival of the universe and you must react. Now. In that tacky jumpsuit.

Look for the same incredibly detailed color graphics that defined the first two games in the series

Broderbund Software and Presto Studios have agreed to maintain a partnership to produce *The Journeyman Project 3* and all subsequent sequels. With this team's track record so far (*The Journeyman Project* series weighing in at over 500,000 sales and 14 awards to date), there's a lot to live up to in this ever volatile market. - *Cindy Yans*

The Journeyman Project 3 • *Broderbund*

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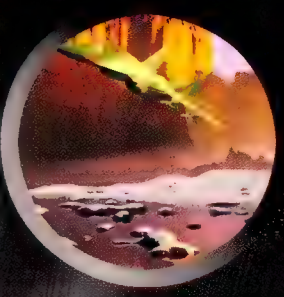

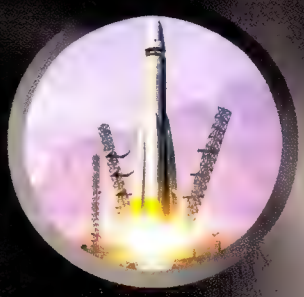

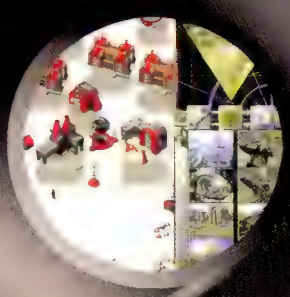

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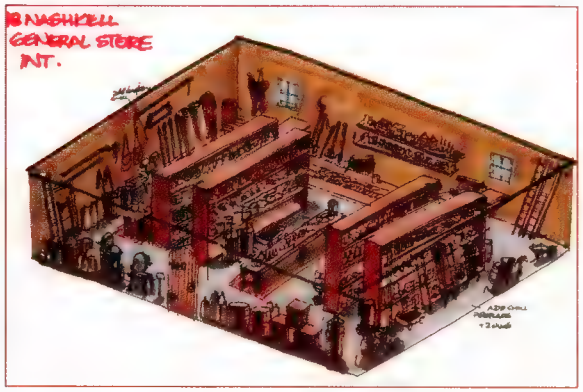
Iron Throne

The Forgotten Realms rise again

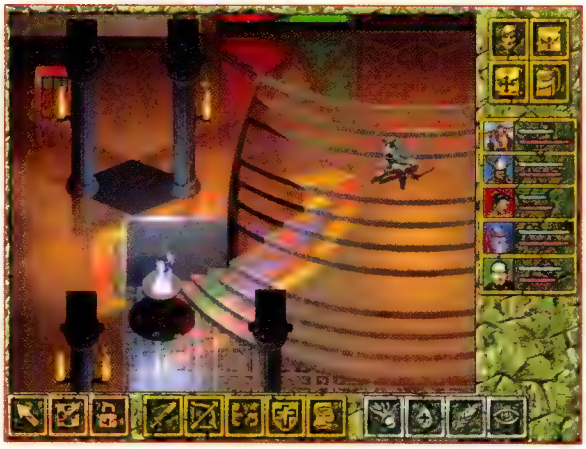
FIRST LOOK ANOTHER STRAIGHT-from-the-hip role playing game is on the way from Interplay. Developed by BioWare, *Iron Throne* will be a chip off the marble sculpture of the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* license, and will hence be set in the highly traversed Forgotten Realms. As The Simbul has said, "There are those who attempt to keep the Realms as it is, forever resisting change that is demanded by nature... The Realms change; seldom at the speed desired of those who strive, but far too quickly for those who resist..."



This is a preliminary sketch of a general store

And so progresses the Forgotten Realms – the more it changes, the more it stays the same, which is lucky for us, and for TSR and for all the recipients of its licensing agreements.

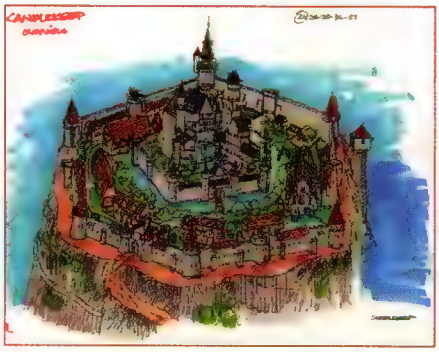
The Time of Troubles has come and gone (in *somebody's* fantasy, anyway). Twenty years have passed. A shortage of iron has visited a period of tremendous consternation upon the lands of the Sword Coast (the smithies of which have just about given up forging weapons made out of cheese). In classic role playing fashion, the player will determine his race, sex, class and other character variables and will set out to investigate the iron plague. It turns out that those responsible for the dearth of this valuable resource belong to a group called The Iron Throne (<eerie music> hence the title).



Note the advanced lighting effects and reflections of the stained glass windows

We can expect to see *Iron Throne* late in 1997, and will share more details as they arrive. – *Cindy Yans*

Iron Throne • *Interplay*



Candlekeep, in all of its hand-drawn glory

Could those demos be negatively impacting sales, or does it just prove good games sell more? Time will tell... Activision Quakes! – Activision has secured the worldwide publishing rights to the first two officially sanctioned *Quake* add-on packs. *Quake Mission Pack #1* is being developed by Hipnotic Interactive (this is the development team formed by the ex-3D Realms employees that walked off the *Prey* project), while *Mission Pack #2* is by Rogue Entertainment. Each pack will include 15 new levels plus new creatures to slaughter. In addition, *Pack #1* includes a 16th level specifically designed for deathmatch, and *Pack #2* spices things up with a few new weapons to wreak

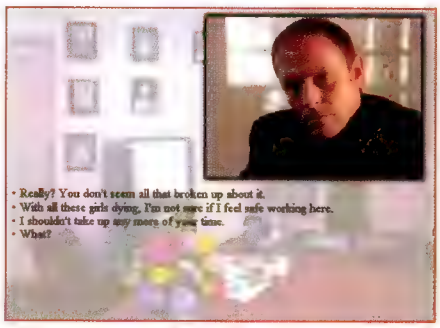
Blue Heat

Cover girls drop like flies in an adult adventure

FIRST LOOK CYBERDREAMS, IN A first collaboration with Orion Interactive, will handle the marketing and distribution of Orion's murder mystery adventure, *Blue Heat*. Amid the narrow-eyed, full-lipped explosion of steamy cover-girls, the game places the player in the role of Holly Jacobson, a detective from the LAPD. Holly goes under cover (or is that *un*-cover?) in an attempt to catch the serial killer who's been picking off one after another of the delectable cover-girls of *LA Erotica Magazine*. Players will navigate the seamier trenches of Los Angeles, rubbing parts with drug dealers, Mafia thugs and erotic dancers, as well as the less-seamy-but-still-sensationalistic fashion photographers and their models. Throw in a few religious zealots and you have a well rounded cavalcade of characters filling out the portrait of a world where the gamer's role is to try to prevent the murderer from striking again.

Spy on friends and enemies for fun and profit

The game will utilize Orion Interactive's proprietary game engine, which provides a 360-degree panoramic wrap-around view. Over 5,000 digitized stills will be combined with 2 1/2 hours of full-motion video (!) to prove that the interactive movie is still alive and well. As further proof, Orion has rounded up a cast which includes some convincingly well known performers, such as Corbin Bernsen (*LA Law*), Paul Sorvino (*Goodfellas*),


• Really? You don't seem all that broken up about it.
• With all these girls dying, I'm not sure if I feel safe working here.
• I shouldn't take up any more of your time.
• What?

Hey, isn't that the guy from L.A. Law?

Rick Rossovich (*ER* and *Roxanne*), Elliott Gould (*MASH*), Courtney Taylor, and Julie Cialini (*Playboy*'s 1995 Playmate of the Year). Whew! The player may also expect feature film surround sound audio, placing him in the center of the action.

Blue Heat is recommended for mature audiences; now, *that* should bring the teens in scurrying. - *Cindy Yans*

Blue Heat • *Cyberdreams* • *Windows 95*

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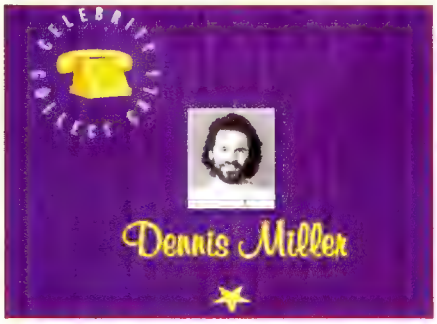
You Don't Know Jack Volume II

If you didn't know Jack the first time, here's your chance...

REVIEW WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW JACK made its quirky appearance back in late 1995, there weren't many gamers (or non-gamers for that matter) left untouched and unraveled by its winning blend of pop culture and traditional trivia, snappy game-show-on-a-PC presentation, and of course its sarcastic wittiness. Since then, numerous add-on question packs have increased the raw material without appreciably altering the formula.

So, one might think that Berkeley would spice things up a bit with their release of *Volume II*. It *was* riotous fun for a year, but the same type of questions in the same type of format would be bordering on overkill a second time around, don't you think?



"Ho, ho, ho." No, it's not Santa, but get ready for a no-doubt ironic flip of the hair

Yes it would, so Berkeley has added some new features and a little razzle-dazzle in an effort to keep their flagship product fresh. Along with the traditional multiple choice, gibberish and Jack Attack questions, *Volume II* lets you match items to categories with "Dis Or Dat," type your answers with the "Fill in the Blank Question," guess a celebrity identity in the "Whatsisname Question," and supply the facts to the drawing or photo in the "Picture Question." There are 800 in all, the same amount as in the original, with a new Hall Of Fame for all-time high scores.

Then there's a little something called "Celebrity Collect Call," where moderately famous people supply questions and anecdotes much to our amusement – or so Berkeley would have us believe. For the most part, the celebs are none-too-interesting (Erik Estrada's bit simply sucks, but what else is new?), and most come across as space fillers rather than anything else.

In a curious move, Berkeley has elected to switch hosts for *Volume II*, replacing the villainous Nate Shapiro with the sound-alike but mildly forced Peter B. Spector. The resulting verbiage is a bit less enjoyable, but that can also be attributed to writing, not quite as clever and a tad more juvenile than in the original. Veterans will also find their ultimate success now hinges on a knowledge of history and sciences as opposed to pop culture, and that may be a detraction for some.

One of those rare Volume 2 questions where knowledge of pop culture really pays off. The minimalist visuals still work better than video

Still the best PC party game there is, *You Don't Know Jack Volume II* remains a solid bet for the uninitiated, but a mixed bag for veterans of the original. Then again, it can't be easy to improve upon something that was so compelling in the first place. *–Gordon Goble*

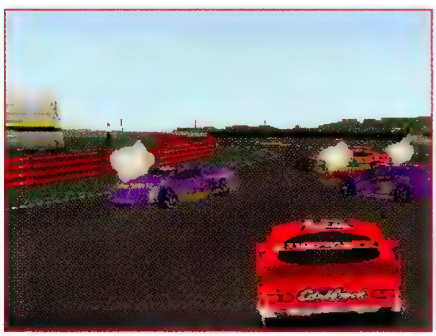
You Don't Know Jack Volume II
Berkeley Systems • Windows
★★★½☆

havoc with. Both packs are due out early in 1997... GTE R.I.P – Seven year old GTE Interactive Media has announced that it will cease operations effective March 14, 1997. GTE has been searching since February, 1996 for partnerships to provide not only financial assets, but solid licensing, product lines and names which would enhance their entertainment division. Richard Scott, vice president and general manager of New Ventures for GTE said, "GTE has made a strategic decision that it does not need to be a primary participant in the creation and management of content." After evaluating several potential buyers which did not meet their criteria, GTE has decided to abandon the division

X-Car

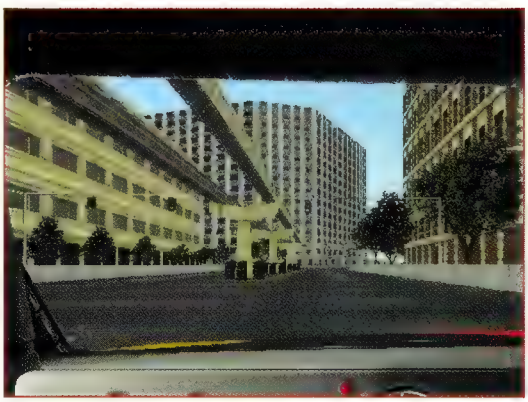
Take an experimental racer out for a spin

FIRST LOOK THE GAMER THAT purchases Bethesda's upcoming *X-Car: Experimental Racer* expecting a little arcade racing game like *Screamer* will probably die of shock when they enter the vehicle configuration screen. *NASCAR Racing 2* doesn't allow as much tweaking and tuning as *X-Car* allows you to do to its 15 different cars. You can change engines, turbos, gear ratios, steering speed, tire pressures and lord knows what else. Test tracks are available for your use, as is telemetry, skidpads and all sorts of other groovy things. Hopefully they'll include some solid default setups, *NASCAR*-style, as well. The end result is that the game should be considered a serious vehicle *simulation*.



Crash at turn three - film at 11

If you've been disappointed with the performance or visuals delivered by Bethesda's 3D Xngine, *X-Car* will put an end to that. Whether it's the evolution of the engine or that this task is what it's ideally suited for, *X-Car* is stunning, with glass-smooth frame rates on low to middle-age Pentium machines (and this is without final code, so expect even more improvements). The tracks are well detailed in high-resolution only (though they lack braking markers) and quite varied, with everything from Lime Rock and Mid-Ohio to fantasy street courses in Seattle.



The streets of Seattle, courtesy X-Car. The terrain graphics are superb, with little pop-up of faraway objects

Bethesda has delayed the game to work out some of the kinks in the car model (right now it could use slightly less steering boost, and a more progressive feel as you change speeds), but assuming they nail that, *X-Car* could be *the* hot racing game in 1997. – *Steve Bauman*

X-Car: Experimental Racer • *Bethesda Softworks • DOS*

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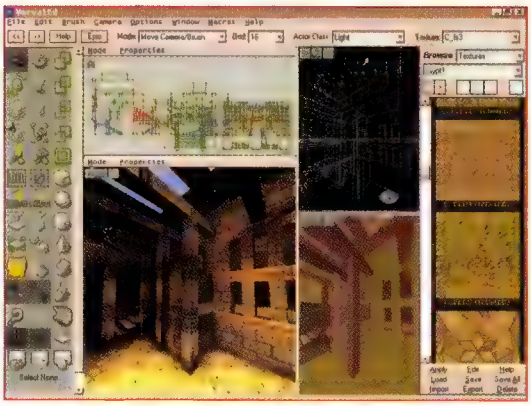
Unreal

Updated information on Epic's super Quake-*killer*

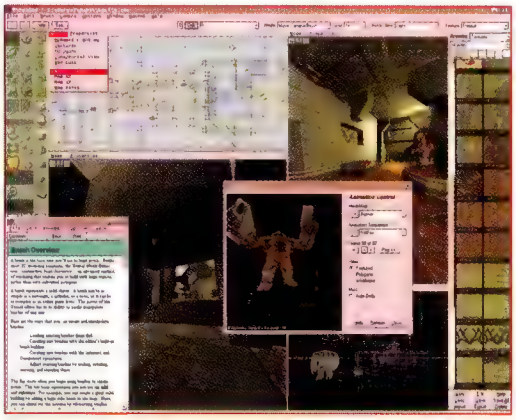


Finally, a decent interface for 3D design. Will this bring level design to the masses?

FIRST LOOK UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN living under a rock, you know that Epic MegaGames is working on a game called *Unreal*. It's racking up praises in the press, has amassed that critical online "buzz," and has impressed GT Interactive enough to sign on as distributor. Spectrum HoloByte has also licensed the 3D engine for a few upcoming projects, all without seeing a final product. Now that's impressive.

As these screenshots illustrate, it's the editor which is making most of the people drool. "A game's only as good as the tools used to create it" is how some view game design (a sentiment echoed by Bungie in this month's *Myth* feature on page 40), which, based on the tools for *Unreal*, could make it a very good game indeed. These tools look to bring 3D world building to Everyman; if that proves to be true, *Unreal* could definitely live up to its rather pretentious name.

The game itself, slated for Windows 95 and NT machines only, has the usual modern 3D features: true 3D, dynamic lighting and shadows, high-resolution 16-bit graphics, DirectX support and MMX support. It features a continuous environment, so levels don't come to a stop, per se (a bit like *Hexen*). Network play is *Quake*-like, in that it's a client/server application.



Here are the tools everyone's talking about

Don't expect any major story innovations here – it's the pure action you've come to know and love, with incredible special effects due to the superior 3D engine. Full physics are promised, which could make for an interesting game-world, but the plot (about a pilot crash landing on a planet) is inessential, and it's unlikely Epic is planning on tinkering with a gameplay formula which has proved so successful for others.

Epic's made major leaps in quality over the past couple of years, and if *Unreal* continues that trend, we could be witnessing the birth of a major gaming force. – *Steve Bauman*

Unreal • *Epic MegaGames* • *Windows 95, NT*

The end result– hello Mr. Guns for Hands

and has given employees approximately 60 days to effect a shutdown. A skeleton staff will be retained to supply technical support and continue shutdown activities at the Carlsbad, CA location through June 30, but it is estimated that at least 85 people will be pounding the pavement by the end of March… The road to Moscow grows longer – At press time, Arsenal Publishing announced that is has slipped the release of its upcoming wargame, *Road to Moscow* (see preview this month), to late April or early May. After that will be *Zhukov's Campaign*, a game that will be both an add-on and stand-alone (expected four months later), and the Mac version of *Moscow*, followed in six

Ares Rising

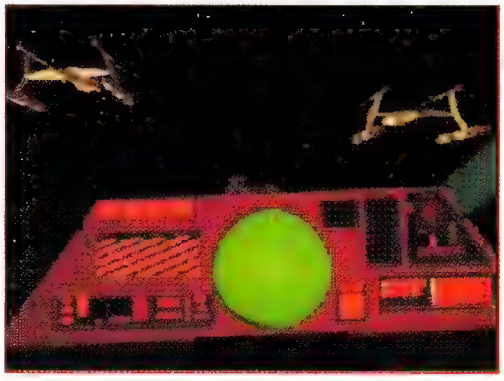
Privateer vets give us space mercenaries in real-time

FIRST LOOK IDM PRODUCTIONS certainly has no liquid center; it is solid to the core, with the lead designer, lead programmer and writer from the award winning team who brought us *Privateer*. In collaboration with Cyberdreams, they are now producing a strategy action title combining whirlwind space combat with the must-haves of the real-time strategy game: armament mustering, weapon accumulation, defensive and offensive maneuvers, resource management and planning.

The base – whatta mess

The player is a small-time mercenary, caught up in the struggle for scarce resources in an ever more populated galaxy. There's been a recent discovery of an ancient alien device, about the size of an asteroid, which is known only as the Micomicon Device (no dolphins were harmed). The desire to control this device is a central motivation for factions of power mongers throughout the universe. While no one knows exactly what it is for, they do know that they *want* it...and will risk everything to obtain it.

Real-time 3D rendered space flight missions are combined with pre-rendered animated sequences which allow players to move about the base, converse with allies and negotiate assignments. Full network play is supported, enabling players to choose head-to-head competition for up to eight players. Teams may be formed against computer controlled missions, either cooperatively or as rivals. Everything fans of this sort of thing could possibly want. - *Cindy Yans*



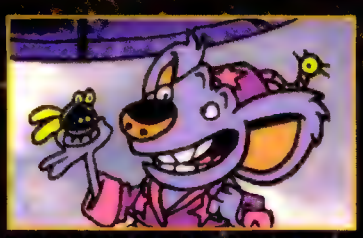
Fight head to head against friends and relatives

Ares Rising • *Cyberdreams* • *Windows 95*

The road is straight. It's the journey that's twisted.

Smash his clackers and call him a soprano. Koala Lumpur, mystic marsupial, has set off a cosmic chain reaction that if left unchecked will lead to comedic apocalyptic meltdown. With your help, Koala must search for world-saving lost scrolls in a ripping adventure across the comic universe. You're in scary company.... Supreme beings armed with guilt and the knowledge of your secret desires; packs of wild dogs; even a brawny, brokenhearted babe fresh out of therapy and ready to kick your butt. This is no vacation.

Broderbund



Four worlds filled with brain-bending puzzles and 360 degrees of twisted, scrolling depravity.

Koala Lumpur

JOURNEY TO THE EDGE™

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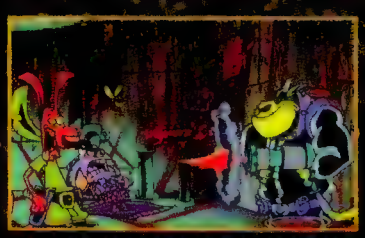

The only game where peeing and farting are acceptable forms of communication.

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TEEN T

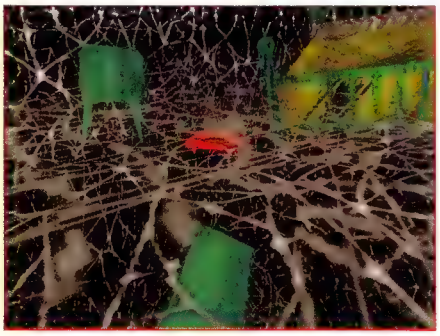
Wes Craven's Principles of Fear

Where you have a mouth and you must not scream

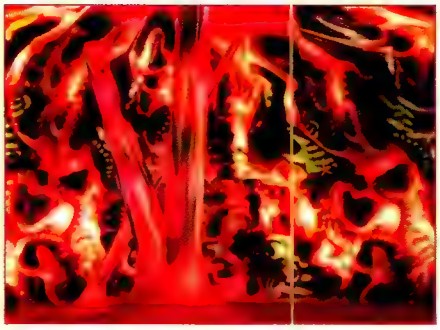
FIRST LOOK ASYLUM ENTERTAINMENT, fathers of the *General* brothers (*Allied* and *Panzer*), is working with Cyberdreams on their next PC title, *Wes Craven's Principles of Fear*. Wes Craven, who recently finished the feature film *Scream*, is certainly recognized as one of the primary masters of modern horror; his films include *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (ad infinitum), *The People Under the Stairs* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. This will be his first undertaking in the world of interactive entertainment, and he and the Asylum group will certainly compose a compelling team.

The object of the design will be to create an action-adventure which explores the many different levels of human fear and conflict. Players will be trapped in a dark edifice, and will be forced to confront and conquer their Seven Mortal Fears (second cousins to the Seven Deadly Sins, and remote in-laws to the Seven Cardinal Virtues). These are: Fear of the Bad Parent (the Christina Crawford Syndrome), Fear of the Predator, Fear of Immobility, Fear of Falling, Fear of Drowning, Fear of Loss of Self, Fear of Chaos and Fear of the Bad Haircut. Oops, scratch that last one. We see the fears progress from the most primal–that of a child being abandoned by a parent–to the more complex manifestations of our irrational psyches. The latter include influences from more social and intellectual sources.

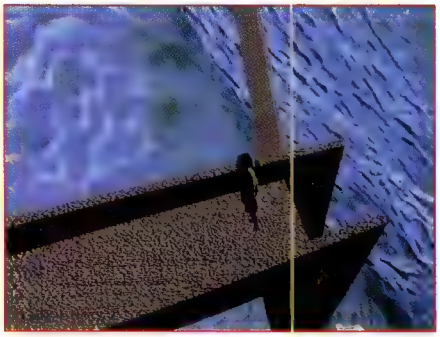
Fear of a clean house



Fear of the World Wide Web



Fear of garish color palettes



Fear of rendered water

The player will undergo challenges and tests during each phase of anxiety, calling upon his or her abilities to reason and come to grips with a more rational approach to facing one's fears. This one could take us right over the edge. - *Cindy Yans*

Wes Craven's Principles of Fear • *Cyberdreams • Windows 95*

months by ***Road to Paris***, the West Front version. Their naval game ***Weapons Free*** and an as-yet unnamed tactical armor game are just about through the design phase and should be under development by the time you read this. In other Arsenal news, president Jim DeGoey has expressed surprise at the **lackluster sales of *TacOps* to the U.S. military**, despite high-level backing in the services (including no less than the Commandant of the Marine Corps). **Sales to *foreign* nations** of this game of modern tactical combat have been fairly brisk (nations include Canada, Saudi Arabia, and the Peoples' Republic of China)... **SPA DOA** – The Software Publishers Association has announced the

The Last Express

Danger at every destination

FIRST LOOK IT'S JULY 1914 AND Great Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Italy, Japan and the United States are pacing offstage right; Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria are in line at the artillery counter offstage left. The backdrop is a world poised on the brink of war.

Broderbund Software and Smoking Car Productions present *The Last Express*, a real-time adventure game filled with mystery, danger, romance and international intrigue. You are Robert Cath, a young American who finds that your friend Tyler Whitney has been brutally murdered as he awaited your arrival at the *Gare D'Lest* in Paris. You assume his identity and quickly descend into a world of high adventure and political cabal.

Which of the potential passengers will be railroaded?

Horatio resists the urge to shout, "Eeeeek! A knife!"

Featuring historically accurate animated characters in 3-D rendered environments, the game contains twice the dialogue of a full-length motion picture and multiple pathways leading to multiple solutions. Gameplay perspective shifts from first to third person and back, leading the player through a detailed virtual train crossing from Paris to Constantinople over a period of three days and nights. The hands of the clock are in the hands of the player, however, as it is possible to turn back time to replay events. Broderbund promises over 30 major characters and an estimated 40 to 60 hours of gameplay. Who killed Tyler and why? The mystery is yours. –*Cindy Yans*

The Last Express • *Broderbund • DOS, Windows 95, Macintosh*

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"...destined to be a classic."
–C/Net's Gamecenter

"War Wind takes it to the next step with style, playability and depth."
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–GameSpot

"...an absolute must... not a mere game, more of a standard bearer."
–Computer Gaming World, UK / Five Stars

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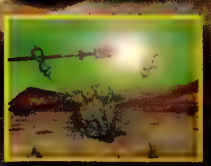

"If you are at all looking for some smart, real-time gaming, touch down on Yavaun and pick a side."
–Computer Gaming World, US / Four Stars

"War Wind will please real-time strategy gamers to no end."
–Happy Puppy

"War Wind belongs to a holy place set aside for those once-in-a-blue-moon games that utterly redefine what players expect."
–Computer Gaming World, UK / Five Stars

256-COLOR SVGA DISPLAYS. WINDOWS 95 CD-ROM

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

SSI
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DREAMFORGE

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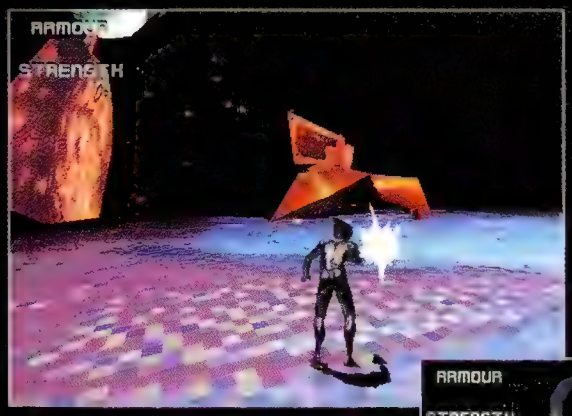

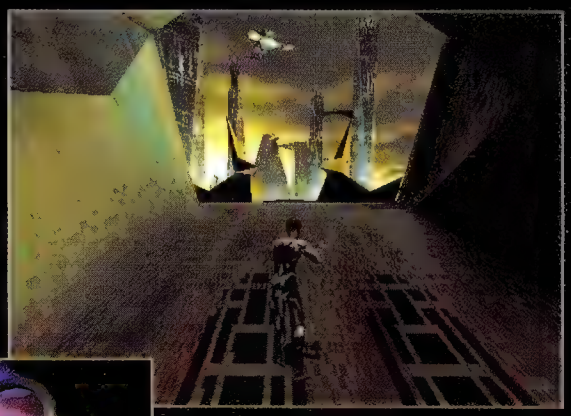

"MDK promises 3-D technology so cool and action so...realistic that it will send everything else running for cover."
– PC GAMER

"...futuristic 3-D action/ adventure that could set a new standard for PC Gaming."
– PC GAMES

ON A GOOD DAY, ONLY 2.5

"There are too many innovations...to list here."
– COMPUTER PLAYER

"This highly anticipated title is certainly one of the slickest games we've seen...could be the action fest to rival Quake."
– BOOT

RATING PENDING
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PC CD-ROM

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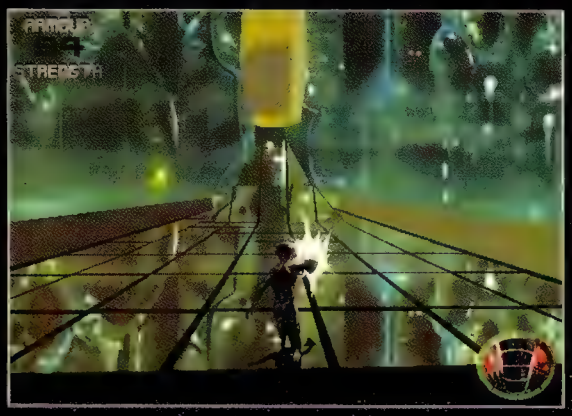

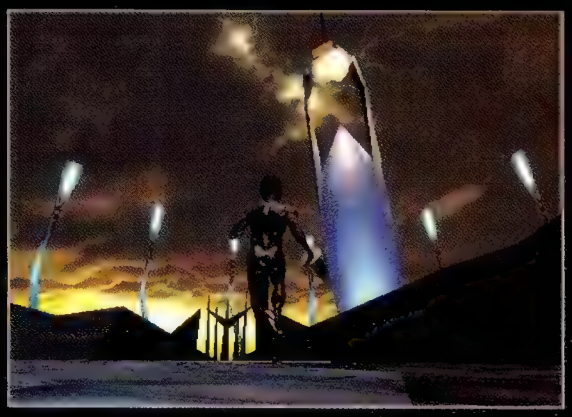

Your planet is being bulldozed by the ton. Six massive mobile mining cities, controlled by a force that nobody can stop, are strip mining the Earth's surface, overrunning and crushing anything in its path. Unless you can stop them.

BILLION PEOPLE WILL DIE.

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- Over 60 hours of game-play.
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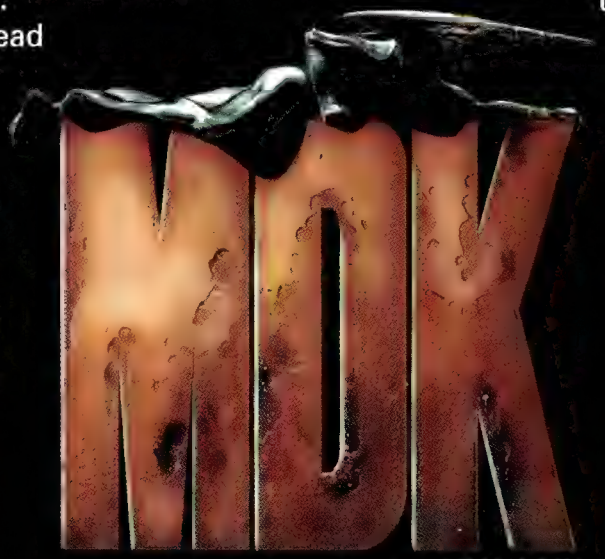
  - A living polymer suit that protects from piercing projectiles.
  - A high-tech reusable parachute.
  - Bombs...decoys... homing sniper grenades... and many more.



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Redneck Rampage

Tastefully inbred chicken-fried 3D action

This ole boy look juss like m' cousin Cletus. Yup, he even owned a gun jess like that'n

FIRST LOOK SO ME AN' MAH cousin Cletus wuz thinkin' that we done want 'nuther of them 'puter games after playin' that *Monster Truck Madness* we writ 'bout a coupla month ago [*Issue 72, November - ed*]. Some folks from Interplay hear me, cuz they come to me and says, "Revis, we done teamed up with Xatrix to make *Redneck Rampage*, and we be wantin' to give you a look at it."

It's a real violent and nasty 3D game that they sez is based on the *Duke Nukem* Build engine, though I keep lookin' under da hood to find dat engine, but don't find nuthin'. They say it has 'round 14 levels, and dis one guy from Xatrix says he be disappointed that people be abandoning single-player gaming, so they done make the levels real nice, with a town, a mortuary, Stanky's Bar & 'Ill [*sic*], da junkyard and a Poultry Plant (we gots one of them in mah town). Plus lots more.

Da game's 'bout these two guys name Bubba and Leonard, who done need to find they pig Bessie, who been abducted by dem aliens (I been abducted too, but dats 'nuther story). Dem boys say they gots some big-ass textures [*256x256, rather than 64x64 used for* Duke Nukem, *making for sharper graphics*] and or sprites, or sumfin like dat. They usin' sumfin like 160 frames of animashun per character, so when dat one guy scratches his behind, you done can tell. 'Course it done run in SVGA only, whatever dat be, so it'll need a big-ass machine to run it on, a P90 or sumfin. Speakin' of pee… [*Revis returns a few minutes later*]

Them Xatrix folk also done tell me dat there be some gooder AI in dis game. The heroes, I means the bad guys, be having hearin' and a, uh, dey can see too [*each character will have a cone of vision, a range of hearing, and will chase you throughout a level, even opening doors*].

So check out *Redneck Rampage*, the bestest thing to hit de south since Grady cleaned his 'still. Down here we gots good games, and we hang de flag proudly, and pour Bud like wine, and where chicken are 'fraid. Y'all come on down, y'here? – *Revis Jode Bauman*

Redneck Rampage • *Interplay* • *DOS*

Hey Bubba, I got somfin to fix dat itch right 'ere

Dis here's a drawin' of our heroes, Bubba n' Lenny

1997 Codie Award finalists, and once again we have to wonder, **"What are these people thinking?"** One of the strategy game nominees is *Monty Python & The Quest for the Holy Grail* by 7th Level – a good game, but for strategy? In the Arcade/Action category, Inscape's *Assassin 2015* is nominated, which received two-star rating in this magazine. What about those two sorta big action games, *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D*? Suggestion for the SPA. If you want the Codies taken seriously, better revamp your nomination process. This year's selections do nothing to change the joke mentality that gamers have toward the awards. The complete list can be found at www.spa.org… ■

Chasm

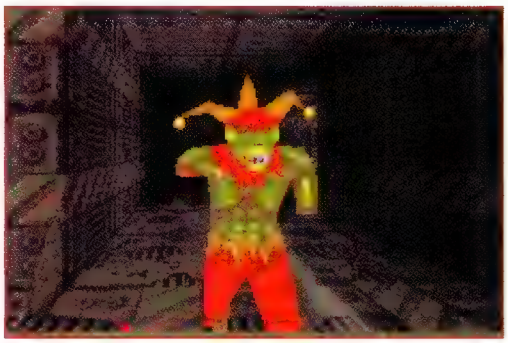
An impressive 3D game emerges from the depths

FIRST LOOK WHERE DID THIS ONE come from? Megamedia is readying a 3D shooter that could give the big boys a run for their money. *Chasm: The Shadow Zone* looks like a serious new entry in the 3D gaming sweepstakes, with a competitive feature set, a solid 3D engine and some wild polygon-based monsters.

Hooded man attacked by disk - film at 11. The 3D environments show moderate complexity, but the polygonal figures look excellent

The plot is inessential, as usual. Mankind has a problem with the passage of time. Time channels are forming, leading to different periods of social development. Aggressive beasts from the past and future start to enter our time period, and it's up to you to destroy the channels and eliminate the mutated beasts. There are 14 missions in all, plus network play (with a *Quake*-style client-server setup).

Chasm delivers one feature *Quake* promised but failed to implement: the targeting of specific body parts. Even in these early stages, the added strategic value of targeting, say, a monster's arm that's holding a weapon (and blowing it off, leaving it without a weapon) is exciting. On the early creatures present, you can shoot off arms and heads or trip them by shooting them in the foot. The characters, like those in *Quake* and *SkyNET*, are made up of polygons, rather than the bitmaps seen in games like *Duke Nukem 3D*. The animation is smoother, and there's more variety to the movement.



The dreaded one-armed jester, renamed after having his arm blown off by the author of this article, makes his move

While the gameplay is only in the early stages (at this point, it's too difficult, but the gameplay looks otherwise solid), the 3D engine is glass smooth, and the characters already look fantastic. Keep an eye on this one – it could be a sleeper. –*Steve Bauman*

Chasm • *Megamedia* • *DOS*

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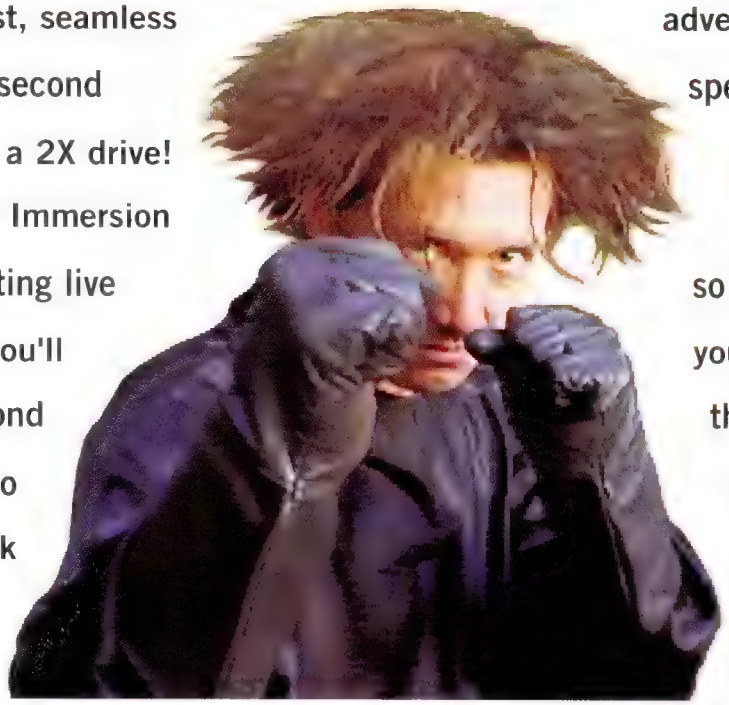

adventure, puzzles and special effects! It's all in A Fork In The Tale™ – the new game that's so fast, so interactive you're killed 6 times in the first 10 minutes. If this game doesn't change the way you think about FMV* nothing will!

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Yeah, they're beautiful babes in fur bikinis. (Unfortunately, they want to kill you!)

These marauding kingsmen need a hand. (Your hand! And then they'll kill you.)

Up for a little face stomping? (Before Geebo – yeah you guessed it – kills you.)

"Thanks to me and half a dozen other outrageous stand-up comedians, there are so many laughs in A Fork In The Tale that FMV now stands for Funny with My Voice!"

Starring funnyman Rob Schneider as the voice of the hero.

A FORK IN THE TALE.
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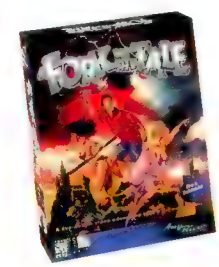

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TEEN

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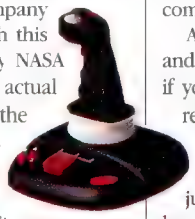
Thrustmaster in space

Space shuttle designs used in latest all-digital joystick

HARDWARE UNWILLING TO REST on their achievements, Thrustmaster, the game and sim controller giant, has been busy developing new products to further cement their position within the industry. Their next flagship product is slated to be called the *Millennium 3D Inceptor*. This impressive piece of hardware is the one that was rumored to be based on the Space Shuttle stick design (the company has quite a bit of experience with this type of stick, because they supply NASA with the controllers used in the actual Shuttle simulators used to train the astronauts). This two handed controller will showcase a couple new technologies to the joystick world. While digital stick technology isn't anything new, the optical reflective technology being implemented is. While one may conclude that the best part about optical technology is that it's a non-contact device that does away with potentiometers, there are more benefits to it than that.



Because most current digital designs use infrared light and interrupter wheels (a wheel with many holes used to detect motion), they can only provide a "stepping" type action. The *Inceptor* uses an advanced grayscale wheel, which provides true analogue precision in a digital design. This cleverly does away with the imprecision problems such as jumpy controls found on the interrupter designs which are caused when they come to rest in between motion detection holes. Furthermore, the digital device will connect directly to a game port. Thrustmaster has found a way to send serial information through a standard game port, meaning the Inceptor will be compatible in both DOS and Windows 95.

As for the stick itself, in addition to the usual X and Y axes, you can "twist" the grip to handle yaw if you desire (it is fully programmable). What is reported that makes the stick action unique is instead of rotating at the bottom of the stick shaft, the *Inceptor* will rotate around the grip just as it does on the Shuttle stick. While we have yet to try this in person, we're told it is a natural motion and feels real slick. We'll reserve judgment until we have one in hand.

As mentioned earlier, the *Inceptor* is fully programmable. However, instead of using a separate programming utility, this is a plug and play style device which you can "program on the fly" and will allow you to switch from analogue to digital and back with a flip of a button. We're told you can expect the *Inceptor* to ship in April with around an $80 street price.

Also on the front burner at Thrustmaster is the *MotorSport GT*. This will be the company's first product to make use of the force feedback technology (being jointly developed by Thrustmaster and Cybernet Systems); however, instead of jumping into force feedback flight controller frenzy, the *T2*-based *MotorSport* wheel/pedal combo is a driving controller. Instead of only being able to produce four or five canned motions, this design will allow the sim programmers to add as many custom feedback motions as they wish. While a generic software driver is being considered, it will work as a standard *T2* regardless. The company tells us they are negotiating with several driving sim developers for support, however they could not announce which at this early stage. Estimated street price is under $200 and is expected to ship 2nd quarter 1997.

There has been a lot of hullabaloo about USB (Universal Serial Bus); however, most controller manufacturers have adopted a wait and see approach. As you'd expect, Thrustmaster has taken the lead and has become the top USB joystick manufacturer in the world (although they've produced less than 100 units). They've taken their *TopGun* stick and ported it as a USB device. Due to the higher price and current lack of a USB market, this may be limited to the OEM market, but it sounds impressive nevertheless.

Last but not least will be the latest update to the perennial *RCS* (*Rudder Control System*). Modified construction, engineering changes and individual toe brakes are planned, all at a lower price. Say what you will, but you gotta love that. – *Ben Chiu*

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F-22 Pro

A rough takeoff, but a smooth landing

HARDWARE

ON THE SURFACE, THE Thrustmaster *F-22 Pro* seems like the natural culmination of two great flagship products - the *PFCS* (Pro Flight Control System) and the *FLCS*. While the *FLCS Limited Edition* also fits that description, the *F-22 Pro* is more than that. If that wasn't enough, it does it for an amazingly low price. Although the "F-22" moniker infers a totally new design, the grip and layout is exactly the same as the *FLCS* (which was based on the F-16 stick). When you grasp the *F-22 Pro*, the solid feel of the glass reinforced plastic grip and the cast metal base gives a new meaning to the term "heavy duty" for flight controllers. Anyone who may not have been thrilled with the feel of the *FLCS* will be impressed with the *F-22 Pro*. The heavy *PFCS* style springs and the metal internals give the *F-22 Pro* a firm, but manageable, progressive resistance action similar to the one that made the *PFCS* so popular.

Unfortunately, due to the high spring tension, there's a notable "notchy-ness" when crossing the joystick's axis. Nothing too objectionable, but a real "stick" doesn't have this strong a characteristic (if at all, and not as noticeable on the PFCS). Regardless, the benefits of the *F-22 Pro* far outweigh this minor discrepancy.

The *F-22 Pro* ships with an enhanced version of C&CC and downloading to the controller is now automatic. You can use your .B50 files with the *F-22 Pro* if you rename their extensions to .F22 and replace any /A modifiers with the new IS BTN statement. A PORTB1 IS TG1 or S1 statement is required for your trigger or it will work intermittently. Except for the new delay (DLY) macro modifier that inserts a delay between macro key strokes (beware; no other key press will be recognized during the delay macro sequence), everything else is pretty much the same as the *FLCS*.

The first test unit arrived with a damaged pot and one defective pot. We're told the first 1,000 units may have similar problems, but all should be rectified by the time you read this.

Bottom line: the *F-22 Pro* is the most solid, fully programmable flight controller on the market in this price range - for the next few months, at least. – *Ben Chiu*

F-16 Fighterstick

CH's latest is another winner

HARDWARE

IN MANY WAYS, THIS stick is an ideal compromise between the macro programmability of a more complex air combat stick and the easy, ergonomic flexibility of a classic CH joystick product. Programming is simple either in DOS or via the Windows 95 drivers (though Advanced Gravis' software remains the ideal here), yet the joystick can also be made to function as a standard, simple unit when needed. The spring tension and overall quality are typical for CH products (i.e. near-perfect), and promise near-indestructibility over many years of use.

As shipped, two minor but potentially irritating problems exist. Most important is that inclusion of the joystick in the keyboard's signal path caused a noticeable delay in keyboard response (the joystick is plugged into the keyboard along with the usual joystick port). The less important annoyance is that few configuration files for current games arrive with the included software.

Otherwise, this is an excellent unit for advanced air combat fans. – *Steve Wartofsky*

F-16 Fighterstick • CH Products

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Broderbund

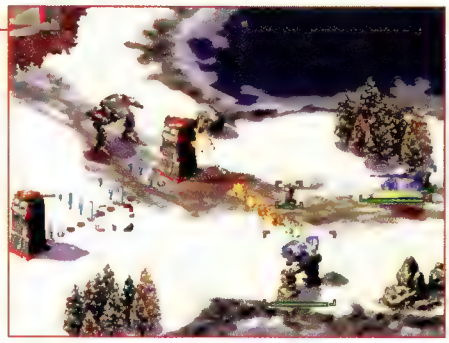
TEEN

THE BETA ZONE

This section of the magazine updates you on pre-release versions of software. In some cases, the games are considered "reviewable" by their producers; however, we feel they are in some way incomplete. We will be giving a full review on these products in coming months.

Dominion

7th Level • Windows 95



ONE OF THE darlings of our E3 coverage last year, *Dominion* is now racing to stay ahead of the swarm of real-time strategy games coming this year. In the alpha copy we received in December, it's obvious that at least on the graphics front they are managing just that; even in this early form, the visuals are gorgeous, with some of the best cut scenes out there. The alpha includes all four races, all their buildings, vehicles, troops, and infrastructure (all of which are visually different but functionally *very* similar), but only a partially enabled AI. There will be a vast number of network options, and a map editor to extend the game beyond its twenty some scenarios. Differences from *C&C*? A teleporter pad, commanders, and engineers who can wreak havoc on your infrastructure. We'll get to see if there's more when the game releases mid-to-late in the first quarter of '97. *–Scott Udell*

Emperor of the Fading Suns

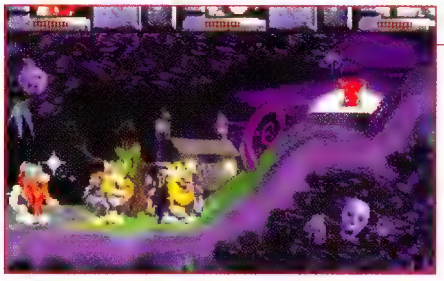
SegaSoft • Windows 95

BACK IN OUR July issue (#68) we first previewed this title, a space strategy game in the *MOO*-genre. Then scheduled for publication with GameTek, it's found a new home with SegaSoft and is due out in January. It's based on the *Fading Suns* role-playing universe, developed by Holistic Design (the folks coding the computer game) and released this past summer. The goal of the game to scramble for power in the worlds of the Fading Suns and get yourself elected regent; with the regency in hand you can proceed to figure out how to declare yourself emperor, ready to face all-comers. The depth of story you'd expect from a paper RPG game is reflected here, even in alpha form. While this is a game of space opera, most of your time will apparently be spent on planets, moving troops and developing your power base. *–Scott Udell*

Re-Loaded

Interplay • DOS

THE PLAYSTATION version of *Loaded* was a bloody hit. The primal gameplay was derivative, but was executed with much aplomb. The sequel, which makes it over to the PC, brings more variety to the mayhem. As far as ports go, this one shows a lot of the hallmarks of a console conversion – the murky colors and somewhat blocky graphics probably play a lot better on your television then on your sharp computer monitor. However, the PC version adds a 24-bit color option, in both low- and high-resolution video modes, which allows your PC to emulate some of the hardware lighting effects the PlayStation is famous for. It isn't deep, but it could be bloody fun. *–Steve Bauman*



The Lost Vikings 2: Norse by Norsewest

Interplay • DOS, Windows 95

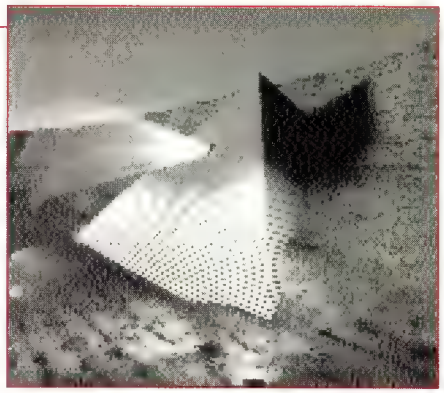
RETURN TO THOSE console days of yore with *The Lost Vikings 2*, the sequel to, duh, *The Lost Vikings* (a game done by an unknown outfit called Blizzard Entertainment, who went on to do that *Warcraft* game). Manage three different guys, Eric the Swift™, Baleog the Fierce™ and Olaf the Stout™, utilizing their unique abilities over the course of 31 levels. Each level is basically a puzzle, and it's up to you to figure out when to use each character's tastefully represented skills. If you've always wanted to use your own flatulence™ for propulsion, you've found your game. *– Steve Bauman*

Secrets of the Lost Dynasty

Vic Tokai • Windows 95

NOT ONLY IS the phrase "*Myst* clone" starting to produce shoulder shrugs these days, its use bespeaks what has become the state of the industry for most first person adventures. Welcome another one. You are Sarah Richards, an archaeologist from the UK on assignment in Egypt, who's fallen into a hidden opening in an ancient Egyptian pyramid. What sets this game apart from *Myst* is its near-360 degree real-time engine, one which allows the player to rotate and move almost anywhere in exploration of the pyramid locations.

Beautiful, pool-filled chambers await and rich, authentic-looking artwork abounds in this unintentional partner to *Secrets of the Luxor*. Gameplay features a radar mapping system, high-speed setting and endurance statistics. Between the platforms and sweeping stairways of the chambers, tapestries reveal consoles containing items, puzzles and mysteries which must be wielded, solved and unraveled respectively in order to progress to the next game level. It's a good bet for those awaiting *Riven*. - *Cindy Yans*



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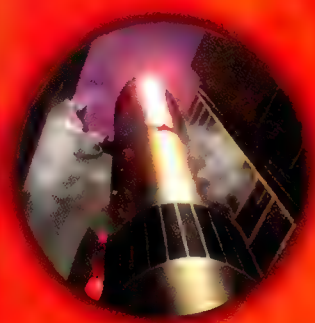

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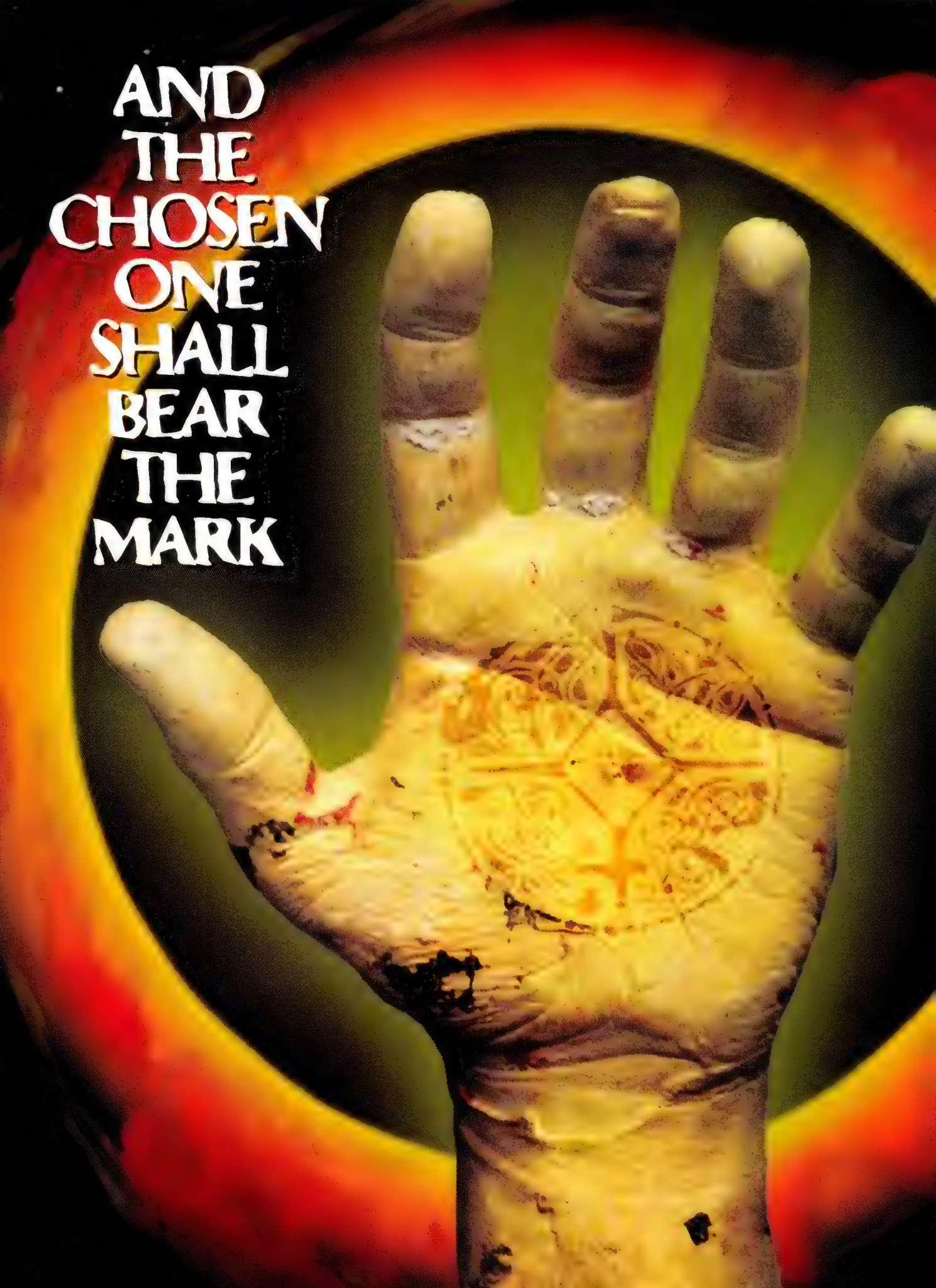
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Myth

Bungie | Windows 95, Macintosh

A new saga in the realms of real-time strategy gaming

Into the breach, men... err, Thralls! Note the reflections in the water

If you say "real time strategy game" these days, computer gamers seem to respond inevitably, "*Command & Conquer*," or "*Warcraft II*." Because of the popularity of these two games, many developers are playing herd beast in their rush to put out games which are "like *C&C*, only better!" Bungie Software, well-known in the Macintosh community for their *Marathon* series of first-person shooters, decided not to follow the herd, either in style of gameplay or in the setting of the game (its "universe"); says Jason Jones, Designer at Bungie: "*Myth* was ... born out of a desire not to ... just chase somebody else around." Instead, the team at Bungie wanted to head out along new avenues of gameplay and story. Yes, their new game is a real-time strategy game, and yes, it has a fantasy setting, but once you get past those gross generalities you find they have a wholly new style of strategy game; they are writing a whole new *Myth*.

Envisioning a Myth

Myth is set in a fantasy universe which cycles between ages of light and darkness. In the current cycle, the forces of Good (the player) are fighting against the destroyer of the era, his Fallen Lords, and their undead legions. On the surface this sounds pretty formulaic, but things aren't exactly as they appear; as you fight through the various scenarios and "chapters," the story line takes some unexpected twists and turns. While gameplay is obviously the focus of the design effort, Jones is putting plenty of time into creating an original universe for the game as well; aside from the enjoyment he admits getting from writing the "story stuff," he feels adding details like individual character histories is "what's going to make the game interesting." Almost every character you'll control in battle (except for some of the mindless cannon fodder) will have some kind of history.

While a few familiar character types appear (archers, warriors, and the dangerous Dwarves), Bungie is striving to come up with a set of classes which will be unique to *Myth*, both in terms of story and gameplay. They want to avoid *D&D*-style orcs and elves, skeletons and demons, and instead use things like Ents and Skræl, Mahir and Wights. Instead of merely slapping new labels on a character class, Bungie's creations will have capabilities specific to *Myth*; for example, the Wights (also called Culwyeh's Messengers) are outlined in Bungie design docs thusly: "The single attack of these mindless carriers of fever and plague is to violently rupture their bodies in enemy formations," an attack which Dwarves are only too happy to help along with their "powerful, if unstable, explosives" (things going "boom" are an important, and dramatic, part of the game).

While we lump *Myth* into our "strategy" game category, its scale is down-in-the-mud tactical; says Jones, "the whole point of this game is the battle." In the single-player game, you will take command of the forces of Good as you fight Evil on a variety of battlefields, working your way through the detailed story Bungie is telling; multiplayer battles let you command forces from both sides in some wild and woolly free-for-alls.

What makes the gameplay special is the incredible dynamism Bungie is putting into the game engine. Instead of a static overhead map or fixed "isometric" perspective, you control your troops literally on the fly, with an angled perspective which places you just over the battlefield. "Fly" your viewpoint along a river to the battle for a bridge, then rotate around the bridge to get a view from all sides. Fear an attack in your rear? Spin around to check it, or sidle to the side to check out a flank. While the characters in the environment aren't polygons (with potentially several hundred of them in a scenario–plus attendant weapons, body parts, and so forth–polygons would have brought a Unix workstation to a crawl), they are currently detailed from some 16 angles, with plans for more in the final version.

Characters (Bungie refers to them generically as "monsters") can be placed into formations of your choosing; ten built-in formations (short line, long line, circle, deep or shallow "envelopment" formations, etc.) are planned, although scripting will allow players to add

You can freely rotate about a central point, viewing a battle from any angle

Zoom in on a specific part of the battle; notice how detail increases as you zoom, a nice feature for gamers used to the pixelation encountered in most 3D games

their own. Current "procedural" formations are generic; they work with any numbers of troops, but don't make allowances for particular strengths or weaknesses. Bungie is considering some hard-coded formations wherein, say, you choose five Ents to man the center and two archers to sit on the wings, slightly back from the front. If you move a formation, the units will try to stay in formation both during the move and when they stop, a useful feature as you try to go on the offensive. Even more useful is the ability to choose the *orientation* of a formation easily, as well as its type; archers lined up looking the wrong way are no help at all!

Everything is tracked dynamically in this 3D world: if a Dwarven explosive goes off in the center of a cluster of troops, the explosion will spray body parts out radially from its center; if there happened to be some debris (say, a dead trooper's sword) nearby, it could be blown outwards as well, perhaps impacting one of your own troops and causing him damage. This tracking of objects is *extremely* detailed; in one instance we saw a Dwarf's "Molotov cocktail" explosive get batted back at him by the (unintentional) sword stroke of one of his enemies (this impressed even Bungie; they didn't know their engine could do that!). Things just don't break into parts and disappear; they continue to break down into smaller and smaller components until they get too small to be seen. For example, an arrow which happened to hit a corpse knocked off a bit of armor or clothing (a button perhaps) that was only a few pixels in size, yet still arced off realistically to land, a little white dot, on the blood-soaked terrain.

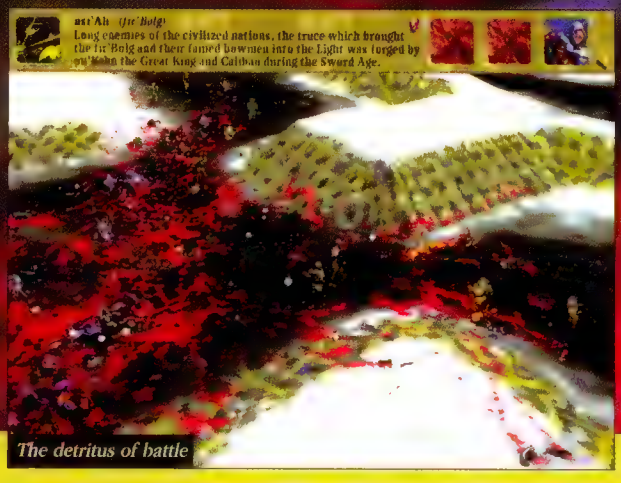
Unlike many current real-time strategy games, resource collection and construction don't really play a part in *Myth*; while some maps may have pre-existing structures, you won't be responsible for building any, and the only "resources" you may ever need to collect are reagents for your magic workers or perhaps special objects and weapons (sometimes hidden) on the battlefield. Some scenarios may supply reinforcements, and battle itself will provide materials for you to use; Ghôls, for example, can be commanded to pick up objects from the battlefield and fling them at a particular creature or place. Combine this with unexploded Dwarven bombs or Wight parts and you have a particularly nasty effect; write a script (see below) to automate the process and you have something very powerful indeed.

All of this is achieved through the use of some very impressive software techniques and technologies. The game runs in 16bit color, has dynamic lighting and shadow effects, bi-linear filtering, and more. Water reflects clouds, monsters standing along the banks, etc., and reflected images ripple. Blood drips from a nameless body part, leaving a trail down hill; if it gets into the water Bungie even hopes to have it diffuse. Snow swirls, water douses fire, and the 3-D lightning effect has to be seen.

Building a Myth

Bungie has created a set of very impressive development tools for *Myth*. Perhaps the core tool is what they call the tag editor, a program which lets them control the properties of virtually every object in the game (they avoid hard-coded constants like gamers will avoid Wights). Want to give a character class a new attack? Just load up the tag editor, get the character, and select from the list of attack styles. Resize characters, change their color, write new story-based "flavor text" about a type or specific character, it can all be done on-the-fly from the tag editor, all without touching a piece of code. This means that even the artists can conceive, create, and test a new creature. The tag editor can also be used with the map editor tool to build new scenarios quickly. While this is all well and good for the developers, it's also important to gamers, for two reasons. First, good tools lead to a good end product; says Jones, "the tools are what makes the project." Secondly, while there aren't specific plans yet on how it will be accomplished, Jones says, "…I certainly think this would be a waste if [the tag editor] doesn't eventually find its way … into the end users' hands," thereby giving gamers an incredibly powerful tool for customizing their *Myth* experience.

As if this weren't enough, Bungie's Alex Rosenberg has implemented a


ast'Ah (Ayr'Bolg)
Long enemies of the civilized nations, the truce which brought the Ir'Bolg and their famed bowmen into the Light was forged by gu'Kuhn the Great King and Caliban during the Sword Age.

The detritus of battle

Ara (Dwarf)
"The early dwarven edder always speak of heroes having gone north into the mountains to slay Ghuls", but most repeated is tale of Dvalin son of Alfrigg, third cphor of Stonehelm ..."

An imminent attack on a city's wall

complete scripting system similar to the popular Javascript language (but without unnecessary baggage like windowing classes and the like). With these scripts you'll be able to "write" your own orders for your troops (individuals or groups) ahead of time, applying them when and where you want to. You want the archers to concentrate their fire on approaching Dwarves ahead of other targets? Write a script (ahead of time) and, when you're in battle, apply it to a selected group. Want your knights to patrol the riverbank? Want to send a group on a complicated route to accomplish a mission behind enemy lines, all while you're concentrating on the main battle? Write a script, write a script, write a script! Of course, you are never *required* to write scripts; you can expect a library to be supplied with the game and for legions of them to appear on the 'net, or you can always play the game by direct control alone.

While *Myth* (probably) won't ship with the map editor, you will be able to change all other global components of a scenario–from troop concentrations and types (creating, in essence, a whole new battle on the same terrain) to weather–with the scripting tool. In fact, it's possible to imagine gamers pitting their scripts against one another, with no direct player involvement in a game (Bungie tells us the engine will watch out for and prevent script-based "cheats" like disarming all your enemies).

Multiplayer Myth-ology

While there's a complete campaign for the solitaire gamer, multiplayer elevates *Myth* to a new level of gameplay. Options will include modem, LAN, direct Internet (if you know your opponents' I/P addresses), or play via Bungie's metaserver, a match-making server which will let gamers search out *Myth* games based on style of game, lowest lag time, etc. Bungie isn't certain yet on the maximum player limit in a game; they

TEEN
AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

What you get to do: Shoot with gun, shoot with D-pad, shoot with D-pad and partner, shoot with gun and partne

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mi'Ah (fir'Bolg)
Long enemies of the civilized nations, the truce which brought the fir'Bolg and their famed bowmen into the Light was forged by ou'Kalus the Great King and Caliban during the Sword Age.

Holding the high ground will be important in Myth... especially if you've got a dwarf with his fire bombs

Dori (Dwarf)
"Hours after the fall of Stonehelm, the dwarves defending Myrgard collapsed the barbican, entombing ten thousand of their number behind as many tons of shattered rock."

Thralls caught between Dwarves and Fir'bolg archers; a tactical mistake indeed!

suggest that it depends a lot on the memory available on each machine, the latency lag-time gamers are willing to accept in giving orders to their troops, and the number of units each player controls; in an on-line "king of the hill" scenario I played at Bungie we had five players with some 21 "monsters" each, all in non-optimized alpha code, with no slow down at all.

Because battle is key in *Myth*, don't expect long, drawn out matches consisting of hours of build-fight-rebuild cycles; multiplayer scenarios will be designed to encourage players not to "camp" (*i.e.*, sit back on the defensive), and many will be fairly short affairs (about 15 minutes). Team play will be an important part of many scenarios, with coordination between the players required for victory. Games run through the metaserver can even be tracked; it's no stretch at all to say that *Myth* tournaments are certain to become on-line favorites. Battles can be recorded for later playback, and Bungie was intrigued by the idea of allowing non-player observers of a match (watching *Myth* can be as much fun as playing it, and watching experts is helpful for the beginner).

A Myth is born

Even in its early form, with many of the creatures, maps, and scenarios not implemented yet and the AI still underway, *Myth* is a very exciting product. The dynamic world and attention to detail are astonishing, but in the end they're just candy; the tactical game engine, with a variety of unique and original unit types and flexible formation structure (not to mention an entire scripting system), will, when finished, hopefully bring real-time strategy gaming to a new level. If *Command & Coqnuer* and *Warcraft II* were the strategy equivalents of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Ultima Underworld*, then *Myth* could potentially be strategy gaming's *Doom*. – *Scott Udell*

hoot with D-pad and gun, shoot with gun in each hand. What you don't get to do: Recite poetry, pick daisies, hug lovable stuffed animals

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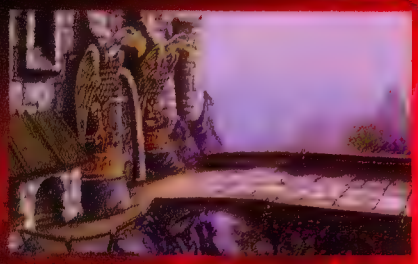

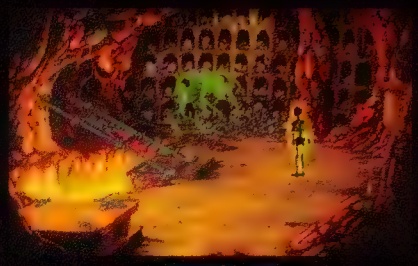

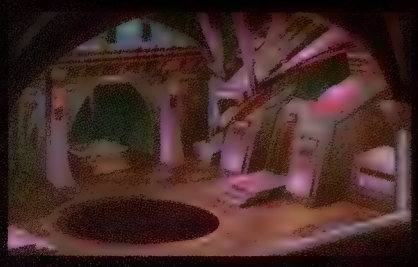

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Shivers II

Kachinas in the Lobster Trap– result? One hot tomalley

Sierra | Windows

Shivers, Sierra On-Line's 1995 sleeper-hit mystery thriller is resting nicely on its laurels. Professor Windlenot's museum is a memory. Just when the vanquishing of the Ixupi has made it safe to return to your beaches and waterfronts, there arises another claw from the lobster pot of ancient lore — *Shivers II: Harvest of Souls.*

Never one to pass up the opportunity for a sequel, Sierra wasted little time in reforming its Shivers team to go out and do one more for the gipper. So where are they taking us next? Cyclone, Arizona, billed as the West's Most Secluded Town.

And the band played on... Hey! Where'd they go?

Your friends are musicians. A strapping, young Mike Weber, his brother Lyle and some guy named Dave formed a band when they were 12 years old (as many 12-year-olds are wont to do), and they practiced in Mike's basement (alienating families and neighbors for miles around). A few years, a few million hours of practice and an Olivia and a Wendy later, a "real" band emerged. They became "Trip Cyclone," named for the little middle-of-nowhere town to which Mike's Aunt Pearl had moved. For a spiritual kick — and to make rock videos, the band decides to pay this somewhat unsung locale a visit. You follow.

Cyclone lives somewhere between the desert sand, the rocks and the sky, and you arrive there expecting to see Mike, Lyle and the rest writhing with their instruments beneath neon chaser lights, rock and roll just *oozing* effortlessly forth under the eyes of nine video cameras. What you find is — *The Twilight Zone.* Save a suspicious motel-owner, no one is here; and the next morning, even he is gone. The townsfolk have disappeared, as have your friends. The only figure remaining seems to live in your peripheral psyche. He is Darkcloud, a figment of Cyclone who's been lurking for years. Who is he? Why is he stalking you? Does he know where the band is now?

Birth and rebirth – cacophony becomes harmony

Standing firmly at the root of both *Shivers* worlds is designer Marcia Bales. A bit surprised but pleased at the success of her original *Shivers* (..."We were happy with the outcome. The product result was as expected, but the people's reactions were certainly *not*..."), Bales was ready at the starting gate when the sequel was green-lighted. Surprisingly, in the original production there was almost no one on the design team with any significant game experience. Bales herself had started out as an Art Director, and approached her initial design from a mostly visual perspective. She knew she wanted musical clues, musical enhancements and the like, but hadn't completely envisioned their manifestation. Enter Guy Whitmore. Heading a sound team of talent from theatrical and mixed backgrounds, Whitmore's musical and special effect design gave the project that over-the-top quality which Bales feels "really took it to another level." Far from mere musical background, the sound became part of the interactive story. When an entity was in the vicinity, the player could *sense* it — almost without realizing how. Between the coup in sound design and artist Ron Spears' incredible artwork, *Shivers* had enough going for it to stand proudly amid the competition.

Knowing that the music and sound would be in Whitmore's ever capable hands, Bales was able to work with a *very* audio-oriented design this time around. With the missing Trip Cyclone at the center of the plot, you can be sure that there is music, and lots *of* it, with sound clips and rock videos throughout the game ranging from 10 to 75 seconds apiece. Portions of the score will also be available for standalone CD listening.

If you think that *Shivers* sports beautiful graphics, you should find the artwork here even more impressive. Although richly textured, the original design lacks harmonious continuity throughout. It is rather like Realistic 3D Meets Impressionism, in counterpoint. In *Harvest of Souls*, a lot more attention was given to the uniformity of style. The look is a good deal more surreal, with colors which are supersaturated and far removed from a "natural" light representation.

Armed with the biggest PCs they could realistically muster, Ron Spears' crew created detailed interiors and exteriors with millions of vertices and textures. Every night, while others had visions of sugarplums, the *Shivers* artists dreamed of half gigabyte caches of RAM. But even with a meager 256Mb, they were still able to conjure a bit of magic. The result is a somewhat comic-book-colored, sophisticated representation of town locations as might have been conceived by the residents of Cyclone. Most folks, you see, never leave Cyclone...(until now). Oh, their children move on sometimes, but the real old timers stay on and on, stuck (perhaps not unwillingly) in the little town time forgot. Their ideas of the world have been gleaned from television and magazines; hence the more surreal visual style, and a sense of place which has more to do with a recluse's *perceived* view of the outside world than with anything real. One locale can best be described as Art Deco Intercepts Hell.

Early pollsters predict that players will be visually and aurally exhilarated beyond their expectations. And if the 360 degree panoramic movement progresses as its alpha promises, we are certainly in for a multimedia treat.

Why is it always Marcia? Marcia, Marcia, MARCIA!

Although Ms. Bales is surrounded by her multi-talented team in supporting roles, there is no doubt that the essence of *Shivers II: A Harvest of Souls* has emerged directly from her *own* soul. While the original design was puzzle-based, with the story more or less springing up around the puzzles, the latest edition is totally story driven. A lot of planning has revolved around making somewhat stand-alone puzzles fit into the story exposition and development. Essentially, the puzzles are Darkcloud's test of the player's ability as a warrior. These challenges of wit are presented through *kachinas*, the ancestors-cum-

spirit-messengers of Native Americans. The player must solve the puzzles and gain prayer sticks to bring to the altar in order to appease Darkcloud and hopefully save his friends.

One thing which stands out when listening to Marcia describe her story is that she really *knows* Cyclone, inside and out. She knows its residents, its secrets and its lore and history. The characters which are exposed to the player through snippets of notes, documents, film clips, files and articles may actually come alive simply because they are *completely* fleshed out in the mind of their creator. Because their story is so real to her, Marcia has been able to breathe full life into their representations. They have motivations, personalities and a background story, all as fully realized as though they were being prepared for a feature filmshoot.

As for the history of time and place, during the spring of 1995, Marcia was able to visit Arizona and see many, many small desert towns just like Cyclone, and was able to do some research at museums and reservations about the Hopi and their relationship to the Anasazi Indians and kachinas – some of it to impart flavor, but a lot of it to insure that any story details born more from imagination than fact would not be offensive to any tribal sensibility.

Surprise. While there, she found she may have been treading on very thin ice. One museum housed an exposé about a Marvel Comics release which expounded upon the malevolence of certain chain-saw-wielding kachinas. This publication prompted an entire campaign of demonstrations and letters to Congress to ban the use of the word *kachina*; to get the word Anasazi stricken from public records...an entire barrage of issue-driven sentiment had been stirred up. Luckily, the evil, nuke-toting *Shivers* kachinas had not been hard-coded, and Marcia was still able to reflect the Hopi view of kachinas as mostly benevolent spirits. So we should see no picket signs outside corporate headquarters proclaiming, "Sierra On-Line Insults Native-Americans."

Marcia has done a *lot* of game and puzzle research during her designer stints – played lots of board games, got hold of dozens of old puzzle game books, acquired all the little hand held puzzles she could lay her little hands on – and she comes to the conclusion that there are no new puzzles, only the same old ones in different costumes (well, Trilobyte knew that...). She feels, however, that she has learned a lot about puzzle design and incorporation between this and her initial dip into the *Shivers* wading pool.

Although Ms. Bales is surrounded by her multi-talented team in supporting roles, there is no doubt that the essence of Shivers II: A Harvest of Souls has emerged directly from her own soul.

On-line puzzle sharing

One of the unusual features of the game will be the possibility of puzzle redesign for Internet sharing. A netspace will be available for chat sessions while playing the game individually, and players will be able to upload and download their own versions of some of the games' puzzles, to stump and frustrate one another. The team toyed with the idea of allowing puzzle importation directly into an existing game, but since it is possible to design unsolvable puzzles, the possibility also exists that importing one of them will render a player helpless to proceed in the game. The current plan is thus to allow for modular design, testing and posting of one's efforts. This way, if an unsolvable puzzle is posted, you can simply send a vigilante squad ahead to take out the perpetrator; at least the game-in-progress will remain intact.

If all goes as planned, *Shivers II* should attract not only the word-of-mouth crowd which made its predecessor a sleeper hit; it will most likely be a *waking* experience, when that emerging lobster claw grabs us by the throat — just before plunging us head first into the pot of boiling water. Is it true that lobsters think they can hear us scream? – *Cindy Yans*

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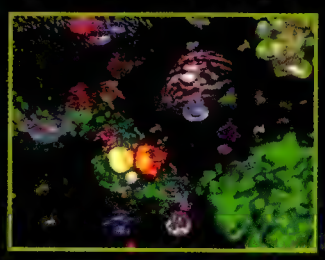

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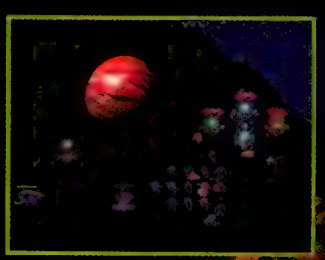

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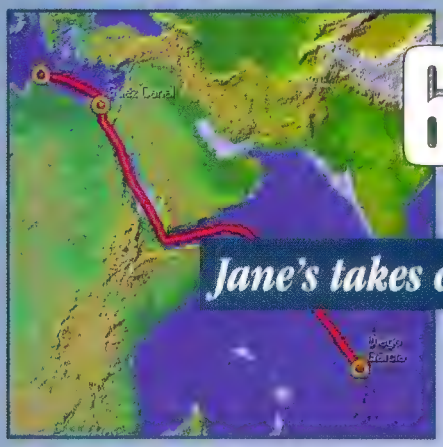


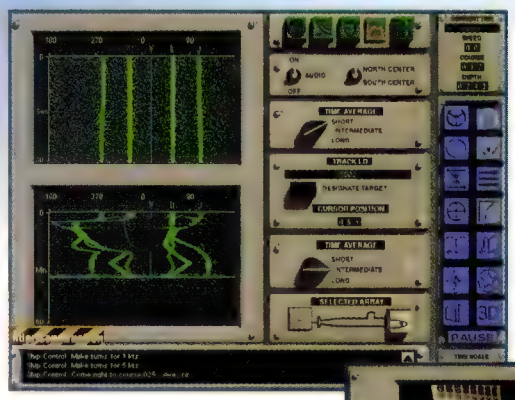
688i Hunter Killer

Electronic Arts • Windows 95

Jane's takes contemporary submarine warfare to the next level

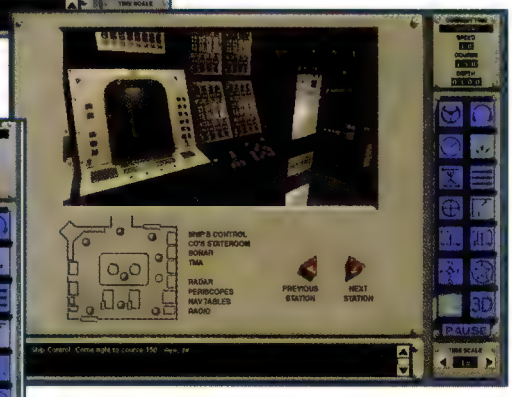
◀ *The next campaign region*

WWII submarine combat has been given pretty thorough treatment recently, with both *Aces of the Deep* and *Silent Hunter* as definitive works in the genre. However, nothing has come near those two for detail and variety in the area of late-20th century technology. Jane's Combat Simulations is preparing to change that; Paul Grace has found his dream team for the project in Sonalysts, Inc., a multi-million dollar defense contractor which has converted its military-support technology into a series of more commercially oriented ventures – education, entertainment, industrial design, movie-making (they provided technical support for *The Hunt for Red October* as well as TBS' *Moonshot*), and promotional product. An interesting twist on the idea of beating swords into plowshares, eh?



▲ *Here's the broadband sonar screen*

▲ *Stadimeter, giving range info for Spruance*



▲ *Full, 3D control room*

Sonalysts developed originally as a team of former submariners, dedicated to providing technologies for supporting US Navy sonar programs. They then expanded into providing more comprehensive simulation software, for everything from search plans for naval fleet commanders to weather prediction for supply drops in Bosnia. Today, the company has more than 450 people involved, with sales exceeding $40 million for 1995 alone.

There's no question, therefore, that these people understand the issues involved in providing the necessary details for realistic simulation; it's also clear that with the past three years' experience in providing for the movie and entertainment industry, they've developed the necessary resources for full-scale animation, graphics and sound design.

The challenge here is going to be whether this team, under Grace's guidance, can put together something that's not only realistic, not only multimedia, but fun as well. Our early info suggests this will be a distinct possibility.

As with most simulations of this type, where the emphasis is less on maintaining a constant, complex 3D environment than it is on providing a variety of stations, all of which operate consistently and integrate well with each other to give the player the sense that s/he's really on a sub, the focus is going to be on developing the kind of instrumentation detail and simulation necessary to give the player a close look at the work of submarine operations. This certainly won't exclude hot animation for those moments when sub-surface or sub-sub contact occurs; but it will move the player towards enjoying the value of a carefully modeled contemporary stealth, detection or weapons system more than the simple, brute pleasure of technicolor ship explosions. The game here will obviously be in the simulation, not just the shooting.

Beyond the need to provide high-quality sonar, stealth and weapons systems, the simulation will move towards a more sophisticated role-playing model than has heretofore been present in this genre. Players will have the chance first to master the skills of sonar and weapons operation, then to move on to training a crew over time in a series of missions, then to outfitting that crew with the latest in technology (based on Jane's encyclopedic info) to go on a tour of duty, in one of five naval theatres (Atlantic, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Persian Gulf). The missions on tour will be based realistically on military and political projections derived from the Jane's Information Group. The crew as well as your opponents will feature sophisticated AI, and the 688 Los Angeles class attack sub will have options for upgrading and re-supply while on tour.

Tactical operations will range from cruise missile attacks on land-based targets, to SEAL team deployment, to attacks on surface and sub targets. Your vessel will operate realistically in the kinds of support roles it takes on in the real world, and your role in each of the theatres provided in the game will be thoroughly conceived.

Given the experience Paul Grace has with simulations (sea *and* air), and the kinds of resources and background Sonalysts can bring to the project, *688i Hunter Killer* should prove not only a comprehensively realistic simulation of real world contemporary submarine technologies and tactics, but exciting to play as well. We'll look forward to this simulation's early 1997 release. –*Steve Wartofsky*

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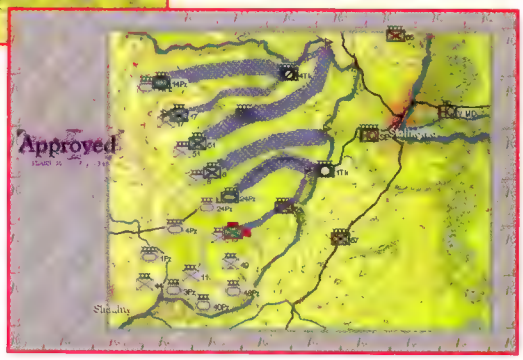
Road to Moscow

Arsenal Publishing • Windows 95, Macintosh

A realistic perspective for Eastern Front wargaming

◀ *Five days into the execution of Case Huron. Note the lines showing the front lines*



▲ *Setting objectives for your version of Case Huron*

Computer wargames owe quite a lot to their boardgame brethren… too much, in fact. Rigid grids, turns, questionable command perspectives, all are aspects most computer wargames still emulate, some fifteen or more years after the first commercial computer games were released. Not that these kinds of games aren't fun; we played and enjoyed them in board format, and we play and enjoy them on our computers. It's just that we haven't seen a lot of innovation, or attempts to break away from board game restrictions. The few attempts have been a mixed bag; the *Harpoon* series and *Close Combat* have done a good job, while *Patriot* is regarded by many wargamers as one of the worst releases ever. No wonder, perhaps, that designers have been reluctant to move beyond familiar territory; they'll stick with what they know works (and sells). For those looking for innovation, however, things have been pretty dry. That's why Arsenal Publishing's *Road to Moscow* looks so exciting.

Road to Moscow, the spiritual descendant of a Commodore 64 game of the same name, puts you in control of either the high command of the German (OKH) or Soviet (STAVKA) armed forces on the Eastern Front during WWII (from 1941 until the game ends, whenever that may be). While numerous strategic-level games have been set in this theatre, both on computer and board, *Road to Moscow* approaches the experience in quite a different way. Two primary differences exist: *RtM* is real-time, and has a command system more historically realistic than almost any wargame seen outside of the professional military (not that even the professionals have put something this intriguing together).

Visually, the game looks stunning (for a wargame), but that means nothing if the gameplay isn't there, and it is indeed in gameplay that we hope *RtM* will perform. Instead of unrealistic you-move-I-move game turns, *RtM* promises a more fluid concurrent movement of forces; while your units gather for an assault, your enemy could be flanking you. Timing considerations will be critical, as your subordinates coordinate the movement of forces and supplies. Not to fear, though; this isn't a frantic "action-strategy" game where the fastest mouse is often the winner; you can pause gameplay while issuing orders, and the pacing will be appropriate to a strategic-level game.

…Road to Moscow is real-time, and has a command system more historically realistic than almost any wargame seen outside of the professional military…

While real-time is an unusual (for wargaming) approach, the command system will be what really sets *RtM* apart from most of its predecessors. Instead of laboriously plotting the movements of each of your units across a grid-based map board, you'll choose an area of operation, select the units to be involved, set unit frontages and objectives, and then have your computerized staff implement the plans. Forces will gather and position themselves (if you planned poorly, you might end up with a traffic jam, or have to wait while units slog their way through the Russian mud), then you'll trigger the jump-off of the operation. You can watch in real time as units move out; while you control things at a high level (armies, corps and divisions), the computer will be tracking down to the battalion.

▲ *Multiple windows and a helpful computerized staff are only a few of the things that set Road to Moscow apart*

As the enemy reacts, you'll have to make decisions; can the reserves be swung to the north, or will you need to abandon one sector to reinforce another?

The game will also have a heavy political component as well (some of which will be optional). Instead of shoe-horning the game into historical timelines, your war will end when you achieve the political objectives your side desires; for the Soviets, this is the crossing of the Oder River; for the Germans, it is the toppling of Stalin's regime. With the political option turned on, you'll need to deal with your respective dictator as you make decisions and assign commands, spending political "capital" you've earned through your successes; but "beware," says Phil Gardocki of Battlefield Design Group (developers of *RtM*), "if your choices [for command] perform poorly, it is your neck on the line."

The game will include approximately eight scenarios (including Kharkov, Operation Typhoon, Kursk, and Stalingrad, the subject of the demo version) with playing times from 45 minutes to two hours, four mini-campaigns (Leningrad, Operation *Blau*, Army Group South's drive on Kiev, and Army Group Center's drive on Moscow) lasting from five to 15 hours, and the full Eastern Front campaign, which should provide about 60 hours of game time.

The Eastern Front has always been one of the major tests for advanced wargame design; *Road to Moscow* looks like it will have a good chance of living up to the challenge. *–Scott Udell*

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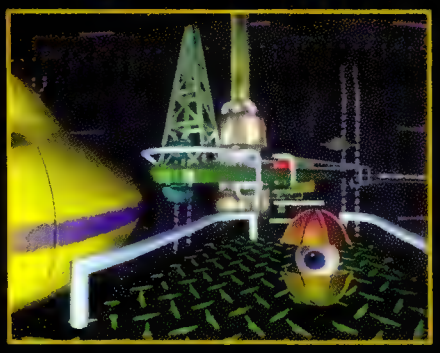

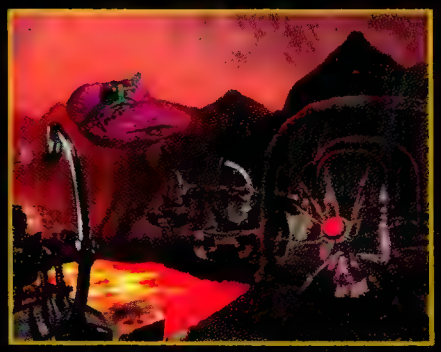

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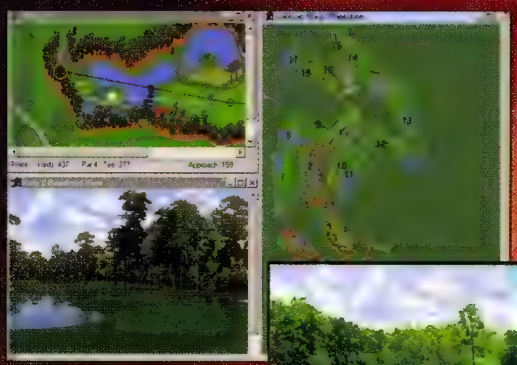
The Course Designer



This is the Course Designer that created all 5 Nicklaus-designed courses in the game!

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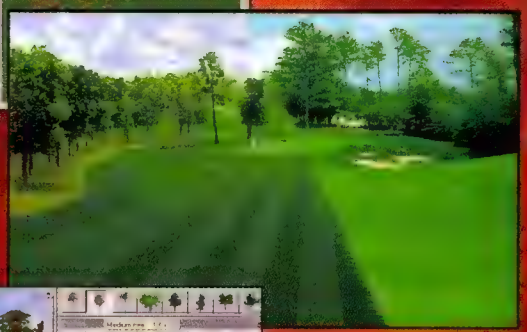
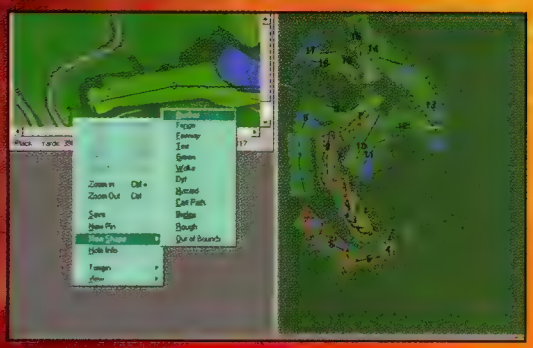
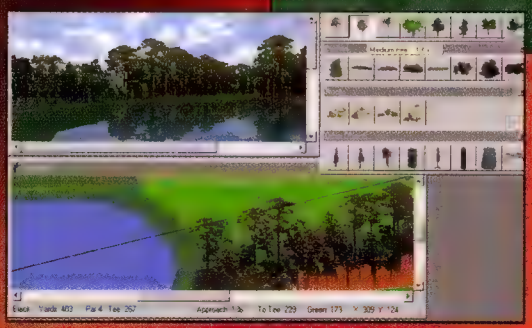




Choose from a variety of templates, or create your own shapes. Changing terrain is as easy as click-and-drag.

Click and drag on its shape

The result: a new bunker



"Is it live or is it...?" Our Course Designer is so true-to-life, it's hard to tell the difference!

This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.

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The Hole View of the new bunker.

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The Tee Shot

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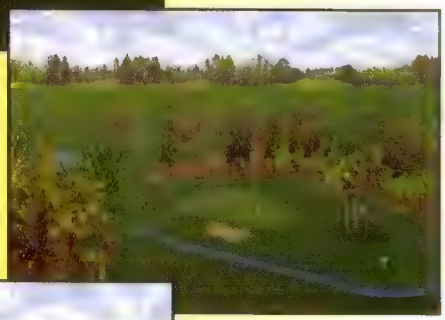

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PC CD-ROM WINDOWS 95

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Command Post

Reflections on a year

[1] Activision's Dark Reign, an example of improved C&C-style strategy gaming...

[2] ... and Bungie's Myth, which takes the genre in entirely new directions

Soiling (Dwarf)
"Hours after the fall of Stonecrag, the dwarves defending Myrgard collapsed the barbican, entombing ten thousand of their number behind as many tons of shattered rock."

It's hard to believe, but as I type this I've been on-board with *CGS+* for exactly one year as an Associate Editor (Dec. 4th to Dec. 4th). As an editor I've gotten to see plenty of games; more games, in fact, than I ever have time to play (especially if I look outside of the strategy/wargame category). We get flooded with products; much of it bad, but quite a bit of it decent enough; unfortunately, few products have stood out this year as being truly wonderful. Because we see so much here at the mag, I hope you'll allow me a bit of self-indulgence as I ponder some of the titles that have managed to stick out.

Because of the pressure to get on to the next review, I've rarely had time to stay with a game after a review is finished (or, even worse, look at any game I wasn't forced to by the need to review it). Only a few titles over the past year stand out: TalonSoft's *Battleground: Shiloh*; *Warcraft II*, which had me addicted in the early part of the year (remember, it came out in December of '95); *Mission Critical*, an adventure game; and, surprisingly, Avalon Hill's *Cave Wars* (see review, this issue).

Familiarity: fondness or contempt?

Shiloh is perhaps the most interesting in that it raises the question: does "familiarity make the heart grow fonder," or does "familiarity breed contempt?" *Shiloh* is an example of the former in two ways. First, user interface: when I got the first of the *Battleground* games (*Ardennes*), I found the interface awkward and gameplay a bit stilted; this impression lasted a bit with *Gettysburg*, but by the time of *Waterloo* and *Shiloh* the system was "old hat," and no longer got in the way of my gaming. The second example is one peculiar, perhaps, to wargames over the larger strategy game category: *Shiloh* included the battle of Wilson's Creek, the one engagement in the Civil War I feel I know fairly well (although I still can't match up with the *grognards* who can remember the names and positions of every commander and unit). This familiarity with one of the battles in the game made the whole package much more enjoyable, and extended my interest in the game beyond anything I'd normally experience.

On the other hand, this year has seen a rash of sequels, or titles which are not even fully fleshed-out, but merely rehashes of earlier titles. Last year's *Terror from the Deep* was just such a rehashing, but one which didn't bother me; I loved that game as much (*almost* as much?) as the original *X-COM*. You can argue that the same thing goes for most of the TalonSoft titles (especially the three US Civil War games, which have virtually the same engine), but as with *Terror*, these don't bother me. *Command & Conquer: Red Alert*, however, is one example where "familiarity breeds contempt." Well, okay; "contempt" is certainly too strong a word, as I definitely don't hate *Red Alert*...far from it. But I (along, I think, with many *C&C* devotees) found that it just didn't catch my fancy the way the original did; yes, it was more of the same excellent fare, but even *filet mignon* night after night would grow tiresome.

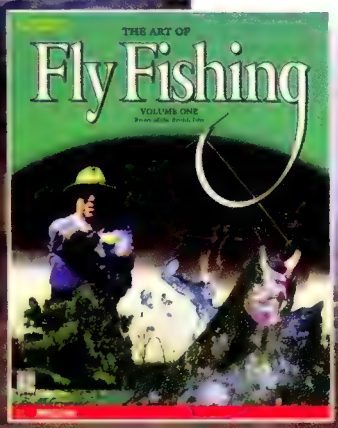
Handling a specific "genre beat" can give rise to "genre burnout": after the fifteenth strategy game they all kind of blur together, and *Civilization II* only elicits a "yeah, not bad." That's probably why *Mission Critical* stood out this year; that and the fact that there's an amazing little strategy game buried inside it.

As I write this, the 1996 gaming year isn't quite over yet–we've still got the last of the Christmas release rush to go–so I can't say for certain what my picks for the top games of the year will be (you'll have to wait for our awards issue for that), but I'd be willing to bet that it's going to be a lot harder to choose this year's games, either because nothing really stands out (in the strategy/wargame section) or because several things stand out at once (I don't envy the action gamers: *Quake*, *Duke 3D*, or *Tomb Raider*?).

The year to come?

Right now companies are focusing on getting their games out into the holiday meat market, but even so we've begun to hear about many of the titles for next year; unfortunately, it looks to be an even worse year for clones and "me-too" games than this year was. In strategy games, I count fully *13* space-empire *Master of Orion* clones (including the just released *MOO2*)

Kicks Bass.



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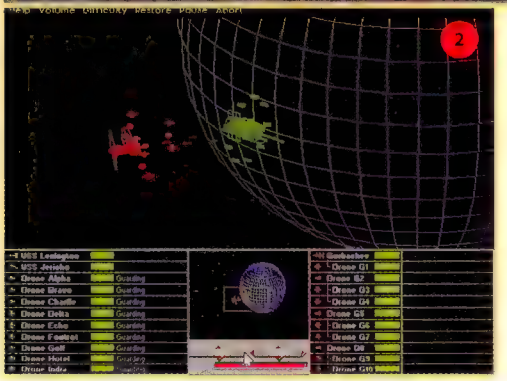
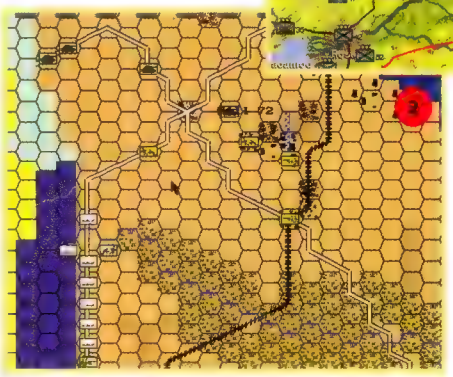


[1] **Wilson's Creek's "Bloody Hill" in Battleground: Shiloh**

[2] **The strategy game inside Mission Critical**

coming within the next twelve months, and *seventeen* of what I call the "Clone & Conquer" games (including *Red Alert* and *Starcraft*). Not included in these counts are games like the (thankfully!) different *Star General* and *MAX* or *Outpost 2*. While I have high hopes for Bungie's *Myth* and MicroProse's *X-Com 3*, I'm worried about the games in the "me-too" categories, especially after the odd let down of *Red Alert*. On the plus side, however, is the possibility of "sleepers," little titles you've either never heard of or that you weren't expecting much from (the original *X-Com* was one of these); hopefully, we'll get a few of those in the clone games, or better yet, hopefully we'll have some all-new game that will come and sweep us off our feet.

Wargamers have it a little better; or, rather, they have the potential for a great year if it weren't for the fact that the wargame market always seems to just struggle along. TalonSoft will continue to plug away; with their strong engine now broken into two (or three, or even four) categories, they'll probably put out something you'll like to try; even without engine updates there will probably be some battle/conflict you just *have* to have (I'm hoping for *Middle East;*please don't cut it!), and it sounds like they've got some plans for major engine modifications (or whole new engines). SSI will have several wargames at the "lighter" end of the scale; right now, *Steel Panthers III* is the only hard-core (we assume) game planned for '97 (although even that might slip to '98). Arsenal's *Road to Moscow* certainly holds a whole lot of promise, and I'm hoping it all comes together. "Small guys" like HPS, Schwerpunkt, and perhaps others will continue to work their niches.



[1] **Arsenal's Road to Moscow: wargamer nirvana or cruel mirage?**

[2] **HPS Simulations, publishers of hardcore wargames like Broken Alliance (pictured) have published a '97 calendar aimed at military history buffs**

I had expected '96 to be a clone year, but it turned out it was more a "retrenching" year (primarily due to Windows 95), so it looks like we'll be awash in clones in '97 instead. Unlike the *Doom* clone phase, however, it looks like these games will at least match up to the quality of the originals. The question, of course, is, can they add to the fun factor? That remains to be seen.

Miscellania

Several items have crossed my desk that might be of interested to readers. *Warcraft II* levels are out in droves, and the collections of levels are starting to appear in stores. The largest I've seen is MicroStar/Crystal Vision's *Total War*, a grouping of "over 1000" (no, I didn't count them) levels. These levels are grouped into single missions and "campaigns." The single missions are further divided into single-player through eight-player maps. The campaigns aren't true campaigns, like those included in *Warcraft II* or its expansion set, but instead are sets of collected individual scenarios; sometimes these are tied together with well written text descriptions, and sometimes they seem to be only variations on a single design. Most of the included levels were collected off the network services and the Internet; don't expect high quality out of all (or even most) of them.

Interplay has released *Conquest of the New World Deluxe*, an update to their colony building/exploration game. New features include a nice strategy guide, a game editor which lets you modify populations, colonies, etc., expanded diplomacy options, and new things to discover (not just mountains and rivers). The box claims the "advanced game scenarios let you start a game with pre-developed colonies," but I could only find a couple of these. Owners of the original can apparently upgrade to *Deluxe*; according to the Interplay website, the upgrade cost is $16.95.

Wargamers might be interested in HPS Publications' non-computer *1997 Military History Calendar,* containing archival photographs and over 500 entries (at least one a day). The pre-Christmas special price was $10. For more info, check their web site (**www.cris.com/~Sturmer/**), call them at 408-554-8381, or write to HPS Simulations, PO Box 3245, Santa Clara, CA 95055-3245.
–Scott Udell

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Interplay

DOS

★★★★★

Take the original ideas behind *Command & Conquer*, throw in the kinds of extra details and upgrades and subtle variety you can find in *War Wind*, add actual AI and a tough series of epic missions, a set of training missions which would do most other games proud as the core mission set, an extensive campaign, a dynamic mission generator, gorgeous SVGA graphics rivaling everything else out there in this genre, full-scale network and modem play, an embarrassing variety of units, and *eight* separate sides to choose from or include in your custom mission generating, and you're part way towards describing Interplay's M.A.X.

It wouldn't be too much to suggest that *this*, in fact, is the game all the *C&C* and *Warcraft* addicts should have been looking forward to all the year long. It chomps the sequels to those two runaway hits to pieces with its incredible detail, and provides a unique combination of real-time and turn-based play the rest of the industry should take note of as a perfect solution to the alternating demands for one or the other.

The basic mechanics of play timing is interesting. You can play in either a simultaneous or turn-based mode, with time limits set for each player and for the entire turn, if desired. Particularly desirable for multi-player, this makes the hurry-up-and-wait nature of strategy play across a network or modem a thing of the past. All parties can agree on how long they want their individual turns, and how long they want the entire turn, to take; the length of turn then determines how soon all players will get to the next round of resources (move and fire points, basically) for continued interaction in the game. The result is that pressure is put on each player to *act* within a certain amount of time, and at the same time really fast players can be held back by the turn timer so that they don't get undue advantage too quickly. Game balancing for any particular combination of multi-player talent is thus facilitated immensely.

If multi-player isn't your cup o' java, there's nothing to worry about with this thing. The single-player missions, campaign and mission generator go spectacularly beyond the resources usually provided in single player mode for this sort of game. The eight different clans, the numerous different planets and planet-based terrain sets, the

[1]Mechanized mayhem either turn-based or simultaneous; [2] You'll develop extensive base complexes; [3] Numerous planet types await your mechanical touch

wide range of computer AI difficulty settings all mean there's an almost *Warlords*-like variety to the ways you can set up your game world. The custom mission generator does a good job of initializing conditions for all players, human or computer, and the turn timers and turn limits mean you can organize a small, beer-and-pretzels quick play or an epic, 800-turn monster across almost endless spaces.

If that weren't enough, the extensive variety of units, possible goals (victory points, specific unit optimizations, greatest number of *x* by the end of *x* number of turns, you can choose your own *x*es here), combination of forces, differences in clan strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of different locations (depending on technology available) all add up to an almost incalculable richness of gaming experience available. You'll be able to play this game a long, long time without getting bored.

It would all go for naught if there were any profoundly large holes in the design, but there don't seem to be; the computer-controlled units will come at you from surprising directions, even in the pre-scripted single and campaign solo-player missions, and challenge you to hold out against sudden onslaughts, clinging on for sheer survival. Even in the most difficult scenarios, once you figure out how to optimize your resource management and unit production strategies, you can make a radical comeback from being pushed to the brink of extinction, something few games of any sort are flexible enough to allow (in fact, a few of the included single scenarios focus on just that kind of imbalance: you start off in a desperate situation, and win your way to success. Few strategy games have the strength of design to allow for such imbalances to work). Both intensive development of a few, powerful units and extensive development of hordes of weaker forces can prove effective strategies, depending on your situation. Resource and unit management operate down to the lowest levels of detail, but (surprisingly) the game doesn't suffer from any

micro-management click-fest as a result; however extensive your forces, conflict tends to occur in a series of localized interactions, so you can be repairing, re-arming and re-deploying units having just suffered through a battle in one part of your territory while engaging in a firefight over in another.

It's usually impossible to project even the near-future with any accuracy, but in this case it's quite clear: *M.A.X.* is destined to be a true classic in computer gaming. Don't miss out on this one. *–Steve Wartofsky*

Star General

SSI

DOS, Windows 95

★★★½☆

You've fought the Allies, you've fought the Germans…you've even fought dragons. Now, SSI wants you to expand your horizons…get above the horizon, even, as they take their *5-Star Series* engine into space with *Star General*. The look and feel will be familiar to other "General" gamers (SSI hates it when you call these games the General Series), so this review will concentrate on what's new under the suns.

The *Star General* galaxy is a cluttered place, with nebulae, asteroids and space rifts. Seven races (one human, six alien) inhabit this neck of the woods, and none of them seem to get along very well. What isn't alien is the overall interface. If you've played other *5-Star Series* games, you'll feel right at home. But there are a few differences.

New to this *General* is a two-tiered play system. While much of your time will be spent flying among the stars, you can also 'drill down' to a planet's surface. Ten ground turns fit within each space turn (though that number can be adjusted before play begins). On a planet's surface you'll build an economic infrastructure as well as land-based military units. You'll also defend the planet against invaders from the stars (or, even better, you'll be the invader from the stars).

This economic aspect is another new feature in *Star General*. Every planet has several cities, and each can support two installations. These serve to generate income, allow you to build ground forces, or (with a tech center) increase your tech levels.

Tech levels? Yup. Every unit has a tech level in addition to attack, defense, and all the other attributes you're used to. Each tech center in your empire increases the potential tech level of your units. All other things being equal, if two units are battling it out, the more advanced one is going to win.

Unlike other *5-Star* games, there are no campaigns in *Star General*. Instead, there are "Battles," which are short-ish scenarios with pre-set starting conditions; and there are "Wars," longer free-for-all kinds of scenarios, similar to what you'd find in many other "4X" games. In an Expansion War, each race starts on a single planet, and then it's every being for itself as they race to grab unoccupied neutral planets, after which they settle down to kill each other off. A Fast Start War begins at this latter point. All planets are divvied up between the participating races. In either case, you can choose to fight until one race owns the entire galaxy, or until one race owns 51% (75% in two race wars) of the planets.

Wages of War

Star General

These last options are indicative of the flexibility *Star General* designer Catware has given us. There are all kinds of options to help you fine tune the game to your liking: size and density of the galaxy, number of opponents, starting cash, starting tech level, diplomacy on or off, etc.

All told, at first blush *Star General* appears to be a wonderful game. The initial games are full of discoveries and nuances. But then, the cracks start to appear. By far the worst, as is so often the case: the AI is very weak. As of this writing one patch has been released to beef it up (it's better, but still not much of a challenge) and another is supposed to be on the way. You can handicap yourself against the computer, and multiplayer games via IPX or TCP/IP are supported (though saving and loading multiplayer games is "not recommended"—a real fly in the ointment, as Wars last for hours).

The other major crack is with what is laughingly called diplomacy. You can send money to an opponent and hope he won't attack you. That's it. That's diplomacy. No threatening, no alliance, no sharing of knowledge… just pay 'em off and hope they don't hurt you (which, with the AI as it is, is never really necessary).

None of this is to say that *Star General* is a bad game. It isn't. It really is quite a bit of fun. Diplomacy can be turned off and ignored, and the AI can be given a head-start, and then you have a very enjoyable game on your hands. The two-tiered system works quite well, and there are enough new twists to breath life once again into the *5-Star* engine. If you require a demanding AI to enjoy yourself, steer clear for now (the patches may change this); but if giving the poor dumb computer a bit of a headstart isn't too much to ask, *Star General* comes highly recommended. *–Peter Smith*

Wages of War: The Business of Battle

New World Computing

Windows 95

★★½☆☆

When Sirtech unleashed the original *Jagged Alliance* a couple of years ago, many gamers were initially turned off by the loopy plot line and the prospect of fighting for sap(s), literally. Pretty soon, though, folks realized that the game was fantastic, and it went on to garner enough support for a very good follow on, *Deadly Games*. Now New World has jumped in the ring with another mercenary game with another bogus backstory. This time, however, the results aren't nearly as profitable.

The premise behind *Wages of War* is standard Mad Max, post-apocalyptic fare: chaos reigns, the oil supply is dwindling, govern-

ments are in chaos, the megacorporations and cartels rule all. Into this B-movie milieu steps the player, armed with a bankroll, a cheap office and a rolodex of hired guns. You get contracts via phone and fax, arrange for intelligence and transportation, rent equipment and weapons, and hire mercenaries for each job. Then you fight the battle, collect your bonus if you win, and move on to the next job. The goal is to out do a handful of other mercenary companies in the race to become the most profitable and respected group of hired killers anywhere. So far, a pretty good set up, as these things go.

The core of *Wages of War* is its tactical engine. As such, it is quite good, if not fully developed. Turn based, it uses action points to regulate activities, and those activities are multitudinous. Crawling, crouching, running, walking, cutting holes in fences, tossing grenades, calling for mortar fire, using parachute flares…all this and more await the mercenary commander. There are multiple elevations on the map, though all buildings are single story, and terrain varies from jungle to tundra and everything in between. Available weapons range from basic, like revolvers, to the exotic, such as H&K caseless autorifles. As the missions get harder, you get access to more and deadlier weaponry, offered to you in the form of three catalogs from arms dealers. You can also use weapons taken from the enemy, but only on that mission, as you have to turn over all your booty to your suppliers at the end of the mission. All of this costs money, of course, and you have to manage your expenses by limiting costs and maximizing profits.

Too bad it doesn't work very well. The entire business aspect of the game is a joke. It takes little acumen to stay profitable, and your accountant's advice is terrible. Just stay alive and win, and you will be rich. You don't have to agonize over how much to spend on your intelligence reports, because they're pretty much useless whatever the price. You rent effective weapons, you get to the battle on time, you win, you go home, you collect your bonus. There are only sixteen missions, playable as a linked campaign or separately, and each one plays out more or less the same each time. Many of the features which would have made this game a real joy are poorly developed. Airdrops are reduced to you against the random number generator; you have no chance to plan and are frequently dropped in the midst of armed and aware foes. Machine guns don't work properly, it takes an absurd number of action points to reload any weapon, many commands are undocumented, and despite paying for intelligence, you have no chance to really act on what you learn. Each battle is a puzzle, too; once you figure out where the rocks are, it's simply a matter of going through the motions.

At least, the battles themselves are fun. This game has enormous potential. Once the lead starts flying, you can forget a lot of its flaws…for a while. Too few scenarios, annoying phone calls, slow out of combat movement, lame radio chatter, mercs with no personality, an isometric map display that frequently hides vital information…in the end, it proves a bit much. Limited replay value doesn't help, nor does an inadequate manual. You can only hope this design gets a better airing in the future, because it has such promise. *–Robert Mayer*

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Over the Reich

Avalon Hill

Windows, Macintosh

★★★★½

Let's get something straight right out of the chute: *Over the Reich* is *not* a flight sim! It is an excellent, turn-based tactical wargame with a twist: rather than maneuvering infantry and tanks across the fields of WWII Europe, the player controls a squadron of airplanes over the skies of WWII Europe. You are given the option of flying single historical missions, setting up custom dogfights, or leading a squadron through the critical last years of the war.

Over the Reich

The game runs well on a wide variety of hardware. Graphics are colorful and sharp, with nice detail for the planes in high zoom mode. Historical video clips (which may be turned off) are used throughout the program, lending a nice period feeling. A good variety of aircraft are included from British, German, and U.S. arsenals. Sound effects are effective and appropriate; the background music is pleasant (in the squad room) and stirring (during battles), although it may eventually become a bit repetitive. The player is provided with a variety of levels, described as "ranks," which introduce increasing levels of complexity to the flight model, such as stalls, spins, altitude, airframe stress, etc. In addition, when playing the campaigns, one may select from several opposition levels which effect the number of opposing aircraft. Mission types are nicely varied, ranging from fighter sweeps, bomber escort or interception, and an assortment of ground strikes. Internet play is included for dogfight scenarios.

While single missions are available, the true heart and soul of *Over the Reich* is the "Tour of Duty" campaign mode. This allows the player to assume the role of a squadron leader, attempting to lead your squad through a variety of missions and hopefully favorably affect the war's outcome. You are presented with a roster of pilots, each with his individual name, photograph and skills description. Pilots are rated for experience level (which increases if they survive) and may have characteristics which are advantageous in battle, such as "keen eyes," "crack shot," "gifted flyer," "hero," and "ace." Some pilots are of questionable courage, frequently turning back with "engine trouble." A significant challenge for you, the squadron leader, is selecting the correct balance of pilots for a mission. Choosing only the best and most proficient flyers may increase your mission's chances for success, but prevents the rookies from gaining much needed combat experience. As the war progresses, you will watch some of your squadron mates grow in experience and skill and mourn the loss of pilots who have become your favorites.

A campaign mission begins with a teletype description of objectives, followed by the pilot selection screen. Other choices at this point include selecting from a variety of armament options, such a light bombs, heavy bombs, rockets, or flying clean (for pure dogfighting). Next a map of Europe is displayed with your flight path overlaid. At this point you choose the altitude for the flight: certain planes are at an advantage at higher altitudes, while flying very low may allow your combat damaged flight to sneak back home undetected. Once airborne you continue on your flight path until you either reach your objective or have an encounter with the enemy. Enemy encounters may either offer

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you a choice of attacking or attempting to avoid contact or you may be jumped with no chance of avoiding combat.

Once into the combat screen, both sides maneuver (in dogfight situations) in an attempt to gain the advantage and shoot the enemy down, or (in ground strike missions) hit your targets while avoiding AAA. This is where the loving detail and subtleties included in the program become apparent. The interface is so "point and click" simple that you may find yourself happily moving your planes around the screen–and watching your fighters and bombers being blown out of the sky. Fighting effectively in *Over the Reich* requires understanding the relative strengths and weaknesses of the planes, the skill level of the pilots, and using sound air combat tactics. A nice database is included describing the characteristics of the aircraft; you'll need it!

Charles Moylan and the crew at Bigtime Software have a well-deserved reputation for supporting their products: within a very short time of the program's release they produced a patch incorporating minor bug fixes and changes based upon customer input. Their respect for the customer shines throughout *Over the Reich*. If you have an interest in either tactical wargames and/or the air war in WWII, you will find this a must buy. *–Jeff Lackey*

Blood & Magic

Interplay

DOS

★★☆☆☆

The genre of real time strategy games is flourishing like a Chia pet in a heavy summer rain. Now that everyone and their uncle is doing it, Interplay has jumped onto the bandwagon, brandishing a licensing deal with TSR that gives them the rights to the *Dungeons & Dragons* label. But their contribution, *Blood & Magic*, doesn't draw very heavily from anything specific to *D&D*. Instead, it's another generic and bland offering, unique mainly in its tedious Golem management scheme.

Instead of resources, *Blood & Magic* uses Basal Golems, critters which are spit out of something called a Bloodforge. These guys are the building blocks of the game: they can serve as rudimentary fighting or exploring units, they can sit in place to generate mana, they can be used to build structures, or they can be sent into structures and converted into better units (wizards, warriors, wraiths, rangers, etc.). It may sound convoluted, but it all comes down to these Golems. The guy with the most Golems generates the most mana to build the most Golems to generate the most mana.

The twists come with what you choose to do with your hard-earned mana. The twenty units which can be built are all distinctive and interesting, although many of them are of limited usefulness. Unfortunately, it takes a great deal of time and effort before more than a handful of them are available. To build any but the most basic creatures you have to amass experience points by destroying enemies and developing your own forces. And it takes a *lot* of time to accumulate enough mana to muster up a significant army.

This time and effort wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing, if it weren't for two particularly short-sighted interface choices. Firstly, there's no variable speed option. Most real-time strategy games recognize that players want to slow down frantic battles and accelerate dull stretches of building and development; not this one, though. Secondly, and most annoying, is the means by which mana is gathered. Golems left in place hunker down into little towers which slowly generate mana. To use this mana, you must empty it into your Bloodforge, which requires scrolling the map to the Golem and clicking on him twice. Considering that it takes anywhere from six to ten Golems to get a steady flow of mana going, this quickly becomes a tedious distraction.

Blood & Magic

True to *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Blood & Magic* has an RPG flavor. The fact that mana generates slowly makes for small armies, so individual units acquire more significance. Magic items can enhance units to make them unique. Neutral creatures prowl around most of the maps, guarding treasure and offering opportunities for experience points. The terrain figures prominently, modifying units' defense and movement rates, a feature often overlooked in other real-time strategy games. Each unit's stats are clearly displayed, along with any modifications, when the unit is selected. Ample online help is available, but it's disappointing to see no comprehensive unit or structure listings in the manual.

The graphics are colorful, but a bit murky. Creatures can blend in with the terrain and in some places, it's not clear whether an area is obstructed or not. A conspicuous lack of sound effects reduces the liveliness of gameplay; the MIDI soundtrack is pretty lackluster as well. The voice-over which indicates when units are ready and when you're being attacked has all the urgency of an educational film narrator. The cinematic cut scenes are hand drawn stills, with captions telling a story for the "campaigns," which turn out to be no more than a series of preset maps you play in a row. There's no provision for playing individual or random scenarios until you beat the game. At this point, you can at least play the maps over again with random set-ups. The two player mode redeems *Blood & Magic* somewhat, but it's difficult to imagine players opting for this over some of the better games now available.

It's possible that there are some folks who are so bored with *Red Alert* and *Warcraft II* that a change of scenery would be welcome, even one as mediocre as *Blood & Magic*. As for me, I'll stick to Mammoth Tanks and Gryphon Riders over Basal Golems. *–Tom Chick*

Age of Sail

TalonSoft

Windows

★★★☆☆

TalonSoft, known mainly for its American Civil War games, returns to an earlier period and a different milieu for its latest offering. *Age of Sail* is a game of naval warfare in the days when ships were wooden, cannons were iron, and men were usually picking splinters out of their rumps. Graphically, it continues TalonSoft's line of beautifully presented games. The ships, especially at full zoom, are gorgeous, evoking the same period feel that *Battleground: Waterloo* did for land warfare. Each ship has a miniature painting representative of its class; on the map itself, hand drawn marvels fire their cannons with bursts of flame and smoke as their sails become tat-

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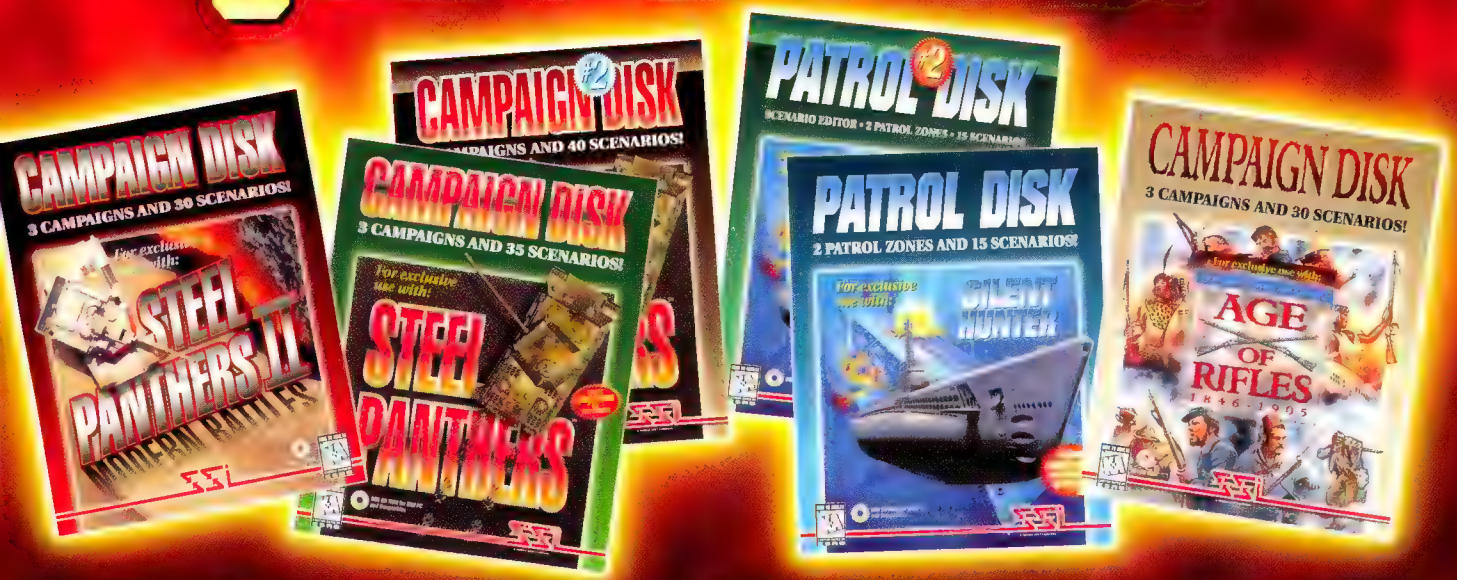

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DOS CD-ROM

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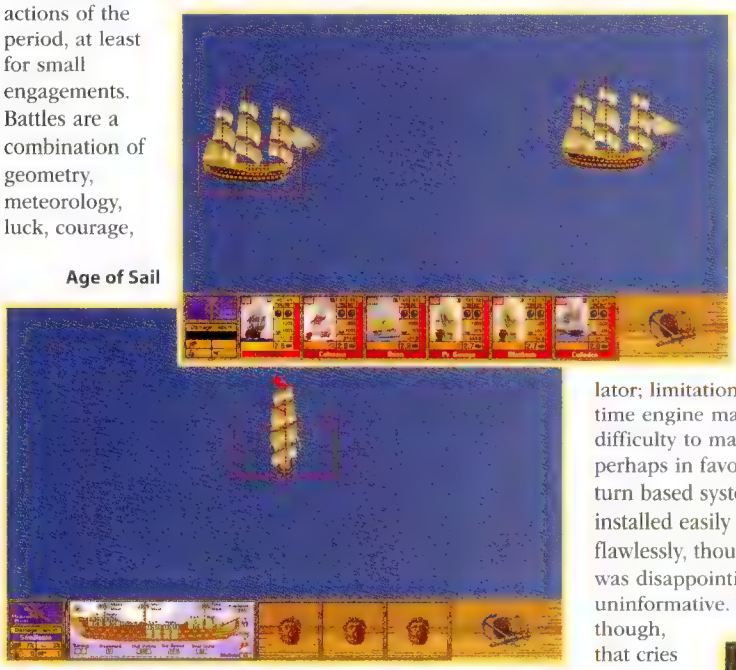
tered and torn and masts topple. It's all enough to make you break out your old collection of C. S. Forrester's *Hornblower* books.

In a departure for TalonSoft, *Age of Sail* is a real-time game. Grognards need not fear, though; the pace is more like *Harpoon*'s continuous time than, say, *Command & Conquer*'s frantic mouse clicking. You have a choice of four speeds plus pause, with the only drawback being the inexplicable lack of keyboard equivalents for time compression; it's very awkward to have to probe the menu bar with the mouse to select a new speed. Nevertheless, they've done an admirable job of simulating the ebb and flow of naval actions of the period, at least for small engagements. Battles are a combination of geometry, meteorology, luck, courage, and skill. Squadron maneuvers are possible, and necessary; great indeed is the skill of the commodore who can keep his ships in line throughout a desperate battle. There are some 100 scenarios, from the American Revolution to the end of the age of sail, though most naturally fall in the period of the Napoleonic Wars. The campaign game shows promise, with the chance to begin as an ensign and make your way up the ranks, but the battles generated therein are often ahistorical or at least very odd. Still, it's a great way to add variety and challenge to an already varied and challenging game.



Age of Sail

Though *Age of Sail* is a solid game, it is also full of puzzling lapses from a company with a reputation for attention to detail and for providing the player with information overload. Earlier games were loaded with information, but *Age of Sail* is oddly lacking here. Help files are scarce and unsatisfying, and there are no range and damage charts (determining actual range on the map is also problematic). The graphic that displays the firing arcs and ranges for a ship's guns does not differentiate between carronades and long guns, only between types of ammunition loaded. There are no bow or stern chasers, which hurts smaller ships particularly. Crew size and quality seems oddly unrelated to many game functions, allowing damaged ships with heavy losses to perform perfectly up until surrender. And boarding actions, those exciting if relatively rare climaxes to some high seas duels, are reduced to two flashing numbers and some indistinct sounds of fighting. For many gamers reared on fictional accounts of the era, boarding actions are the *ne plus ultra* of naval warfare in the age of sail; a more detailed treatment would seem to be mandatory here

These flaws don't kill the game by any means; they just make it rather sterile. There are no merchantmen, no land, no forts or harbors; it's just you, warships, and the endless sea. Still, it is certainly worth the money, and works rather well as a ship to ship simulator; limitations in the real time engine make large battles difficulty to manage, a point perhaps in favor of traditional turn based systems. *Age of Sail* installed easily and worked flawlessly, though the manual was disappointingly slim and uninformative. This is a game, though, that cries out for a more luxuriant presentation. It needs more detail, more information, more stuff in general. It should appeal greatly to fans of naval warfare, but for those gamers not inspired by stories of Trafalgar and St. Vincent, it might just be a bit too austere. Forthcoming games on galleys and ironclads promise a more evolved version of the *Age of Sail* engine; if TalonSoft's past is any indication, such evolutions will make their way to the *Age of Sail* as well. *–Robert Mayer*

Risk

Hasbro Interactive

Windows 95

★★★☆☆

Of all the war/strategy games in existence probably only a few are recognized by just about everybody: Chess, *Battleship*, and, of course, *Risk*. Making the transition to computer again (there's been at least one commercial adaptation before this, and several unofficial or clone games), Hasbro Interactive's version is a mixed bag; while parts of it seem spot-on, others fall short.

This newest computer incarnation is certainly the best looking of the bunch; with resolutions up to 1024x768, rich colors, and good artwork, there is little to complain about in the eye-candy department. Unfortunately, the user interface is a bit obtuse and the skimpy manual doesn't help much; it (and the on-line help, which isn't accessible directly from the game) tells you something is possible, but doesn't explain how. Even so, this is *Risk*, after all, and not *Campaign for North Africa*, so a bit of persistence should let you get into the gameplay. The package includes a "buddy" CD for multi-player; it doesn't let you play single player games but is nice to have if you challenge a friend.

Game options are extensive, with both variations on classic *Risk* and a new, expanded set of options called Ultimate Risk. In the classic form you can play with the U.S. or European rules, choose from several different maps, or even turn on "fog of war," amongst other options. Ultimate Risk adds things like leaders, POWs, and a card-based combat system rather reminiscent of an advanced form of rock-paper-scissors. While some of these options seemed quite interesting at first, they are hampered by *Risk*'s biggest flaw: poor pacing; things either seem to drag on or to go too quickly, with little user control. This is particularly a problem on some of the new maps, which have many more territories than the classic boardgame does.

Risk

Even with the negatives, though, the game can still be fun. There are enough options that even if you don't like all the game alternatives, any *Risk* fan should find something worthy of play. For me it was surprisingly the straight classic game; simple and fast and an opponent who always wants to play. *–Scott Udell*

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Cave Wars

Avalon Hill

DOS

★★★★☆

In this, the season of big title releases, it probably shouldn't be a surprise that the game I've had the most fun playing come flying out of left field… or, rather, burrowing up from under it. Enter *Cave Wars*, a strategy game with little flash, only some originality, but mining cart-loads of good old fashioned gameplay.

The premise behind the game is simple and unadorned: you take on the role of leader of one of eight races. Some of the races were already there, others were recently driven from surface realms by a mysterious group of powerful beings; no matter which, all are struggling for survival in the underground world of Ibido. It's your job to take your single city and a handful of your near-savage peoples and build them into a conquering force, ready to take all the dark tunnels and caverns you now call home.

Cave Wars has taken many elements from existing games and merged them into an interesting whole. Army production and combat is very reminiscent of *Warlords*, even to the point of automatically shipping units from one city to another (one flaw: you can't easily tell specific shipping and destination cities, only that a city is shipping to or receiving from somewhere). You can adjust research into several realms of technology and magic, fluidly adjusting your balance as breakthroughs are achieved; at the highest levels of development you might see sub-machine gun equipped infantry, dressed in bronze chain mail and supported by powerful wizards, defending tanks and magic Fire Devils. Engineering units act somewhat like *Civilization*'s settlers in that they can also dig tunnels, uncover deposits of bronze, iron, and mithral and, in perhaps their greatest contribution to strategy in the game, dig vertical shafts.

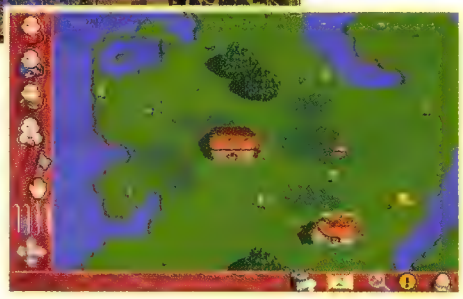
For you see, Ibido is a multi-level world, with five regions stacked one on top of another. With engineers (at low-tech levels) and magic (at higher levels), the region of a map you thought completely secure can be opened to assault from above or below. The tension this adds, especially early in the game when you are surrounded by darkness, is amazing for a turn-based game.

The eight races all have strengths and weaknesses; while discussed in the documentation, these factors are also apparent during gameplay. Resources in the form of food, ore, and magic all have to be balanced, and carefully so; normally I'm terrible at juggling such things, but in *Cave Wars* the decisions are obvious, if not always easy. Likewise are your strategic decisions starkly obvious: stay on the defensive building up forces and you risk losing out on resources and cities; go on the offensive and risk running out of steam, lying spent while the enemy masses reserves. None of these are new to strategy gamers, but they have been wonderfully well implemented.

Any one game can be played with a mixture of up to five computer and human players; humans play hot-seat only, but I can't imagine playing a game this huge multi-player anyway. The computer AI is refreshingly strong; beating me (when set at "smart") quickly in my first try at the game. The only AI "cheating" is the ability to see a bit farther than human players; otherwise the AI is operating under the same restrictions you are (if you leave the separate handicap level at normal). The AI will gang up on whoever it perceives is winning, even if it's another AI player.

The game consists of the main Ibido campaign, the Ibido map with randomized starting positions, and totally random maps (with adjustable levels of resources), all of which greatly extend replayability (there is no map editor, but it's not needed). Some campaigns with smaller map sizes or with fewer levels would have been appreciated; after some 15 hours of play in my current campaign I still only control perhaps 25% of Ibido (although scrying spells show that the Tarchons have been victorious just about everywhere else, probably spelling my doom).

Cave Wars



Baldies

A few weaknesses exist: your empire can get unwieldy by mid-game, the interface is sometimes clunky, iron deposits can be hard to discern on the main map, and scrolling is tile based instead of smooth (although this annoyance disappeared with extended play). On the other hand, system requirements are modest and the game worked without crashing (although the Win95 specific keys on my keyboard caused problems once; luckily the game includes an autosave feature).

In these days of flashy real time play and clamoring for on-line strategy slug fests, *Cave Wars* may not seem like much. In the end, though, its the gameplay that counts, and it is gameplay that *Cave Wars* delivers. Now excuse me while I send my Gakkar artillery spelunking. *–Scott Udell*

Baldies

Panasonic Interactive Media

DOS, Windows 95

★★★★☆

When you're browsing the software aisle, what tempts you to buy a particular title? If you're like most of us, the game's underlying concept is a significant factor. Whether it's blasting aliens in a futuristic action environment or directing fantasy armies from a godlike perspective, you're likely to buy a game with a concept which appeals to you. With this in mind, *Baldies*–a new offering from Panasonic Interactive Media–is definitely fighting against the odds. The game's idea is simple: in the time-honored tradition of *Command & Conquer* or *Warcraft II*, you must crush the enemy by building an empire of… little bald guys. Can you hear the sales figures skyrocketing? The strange part is that, despite the strange premise, and despite derivative-looking gameplay, *Baldies* is both unique and entertaining.

You play the godlike ruler of the Baldies. Your task is to crush the Hairies, the Baldies' arch-enemies. Your abilities include (but aren't limited to) building dwellings for the Baldies to live in, making Baldies into Workers, Builders, Scientists or Soldiers, picking up Baldies and placing them where you want 'em, and even building or lowering land (as in *Populous*).

The basic dynamic of the game is to breed your Baldies (don't ask) until there's a good-sized population, to build several houses (including specialized Barracks and Science Labs), and to research cruel and unusual inventions which will victimize the Hairies. These inventions are numerous, diverse and entertaining, and are a focal point of the game. Once the bad guys have been reduced by clever inventions (such as the Popper, which inflates victims' bodies until their heads pop off), you can usually win the game with a massive attack of Soldier Baldies.

The plethora of inventions to research and choose from, and the strategies they present, account for much of the game's pleasure. Drop a Skunk bomb to send Hairies fleeing from their houses, only to wander into a field of Poppers. Use a Storm invention along with your Electro trap for startling results. And so forth.

Baldies is a real-time strategy game featuring humor and solid mechanics, plus a four-player network option. One problem you should be aware of, though, is buggy DirectX 3 support: unless you're willing to remove DirectX 3 and replace it with DirectX 2, you might find yourself playing the (lower resolution) DOS version. That gripe aside, *Baldies* is great fun, and well worth a look. *– Joe Grant Bell*

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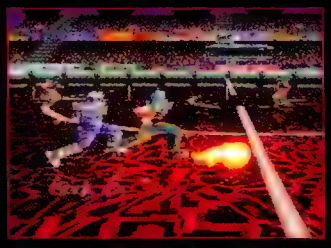

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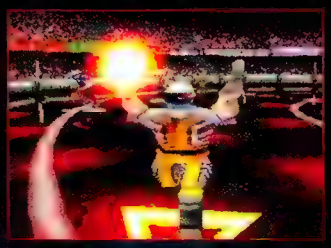

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Command & Conquer: Red Alert

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Take a step back in time, back to when the Allies were fighting for survival against the Soviets... Soviets? With *Command & Conquer: Red Alert* you get gameplay that is in most ways very familiar to those who've played *C&C*, yet different enough to wreak havoc with some of your favorite strategies. Here are some approaches which will be useful both to the new *C&C* gamer and to old salts.

Base setup & defense

Upon scouting out an area and starting a base, I'll almost always try to build a second ore refinery (the closer to the ore fields the better). Probably the single greatest danger you face is the lack of a ready supply of ore; once you get two vehicles hauling the stuff in, things almost always go much better. If you feel you can't afford a full refinery, you can always build a second ore truck; the difference in cost, however, isn't usually worth the convenience of having two buildings active. In the initial release of *Red Alert*, the AI for the ore trucks was still fairly weak; if you have two loaded vehicles trying to drop their loads at a single facility, one will cancel its orders and sit, waiting for you to tell it what to do... even after the other vehicle has left. Therefore, if you only have one refinery, you'll need to keep a close eye on multiple ore trucks. As the game progresses and you extend your defenses (see below), you can also put up new, remote refineries closer to distant ore fields; as supplies closer to home dry up, such extended facilities can keep your offensive build-up from grinding to a halt.

Of course, before you think offensive build-up you have to think defense. If you're starting with a construction vehicle and a few troops (instead of a large force or a pre-existing base), you'll need more troops right off; plunk down the MCV, build a power facility, and put up a barracks right away. If things look really desperate, you can put up two or more barracks to make "training" of your troops go more quickly. Start cranking out extra units; I usually like to mix in rifle infantry with the rocket troops/grenadiers at about a 1:2 or 1:3 ratio. While you are building troops, consider your ore supply: if you have plenty, go ahead and build a war factory and then the ore refinery; otherwise, build the refinery right off.

Once you feel you have gotten past the initial wave of enemy troops (you are sending out patrols, aren't you?), it's time to think base defenses of a more permanent variety. If you're the Soviets and have reached far enough in the game, consider yourself blessed: you have access to Tesla coils. With plenty of power and a perimeter of such structures your base will be nearly impregnable (against the computer, at least). Flame towers aren't bad, either, but if you're facing determined assault (especially involving armor) you'll need more than one per position. If you are playing the Allies using "crudder" defenses like turrets and pillboxes, make certain you either place one of each in close proximity to another, or that you back up with an equivalent mobile unit; turrets are good against armor but not against infantry, while pillboxes are just the opposite. One without the other (or its mobile equivalent) invites trouble when facing a combined arms assault force.

[1] Several tesla coils can make for a nearly impervious defense... at least against the computer

[2] That ore truck could be used to draw off the computer's forces

Also dangerous are seaborne and airborne assaults. If you're facing the computer as the Soviets, be forewarned that it uses its "strategic" airpower very well; you'll want to protect bases from the outset in later levels. The computer is very single-minded in its attacks, so unless it actually succeeds in destroying a facility you can bet that it will be back to assault the same general area and you can place your forces appropriately. Early in a scenario you should position lines of rocket soldiers around the facilities the computer is targeting, backed up by pillboxes or rifle infantry; the rocketeers will get the planes, and the infantry will go after any pilots or paratroopers who make it to the ground (don't forget to set these troops into guard mode). Later on you can use AA guns to replace the rocketeers if you wish, but you may be surprised at how effective concentrated rocket fire can be. As the Soviets, you'll have to rely on a "combat air patrol" to protect against the (generally weak) Allied air threat until you can develop SAM launchers.

If a scenario allows the construction of a naval yard, you can be sure it will be useful if not critical to success. In such scenarios, build a yard (or more) as soon as you can; three yards can crank out any vessel in short order. Before you build one, however, make certain that that spot of water isn't landlocked! Defend the yard from the start with either rocket-troopers (Allies) or Grenadiers (Soviets); I had two lone rocket troopers take out an opponent's sub before he could touch

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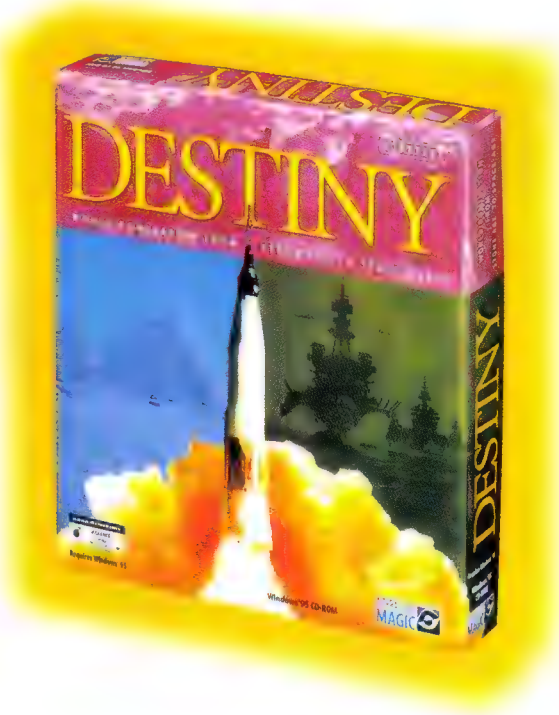

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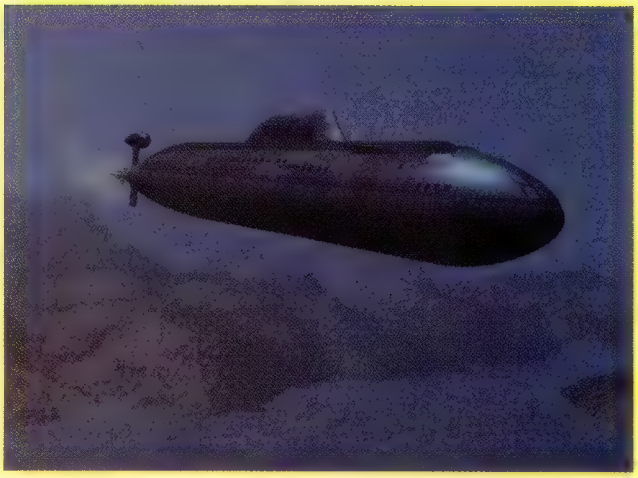
my yard, while a single grenadier of his lasted longer and caused my flotilla more damage than several tanks and V2 rockets could.

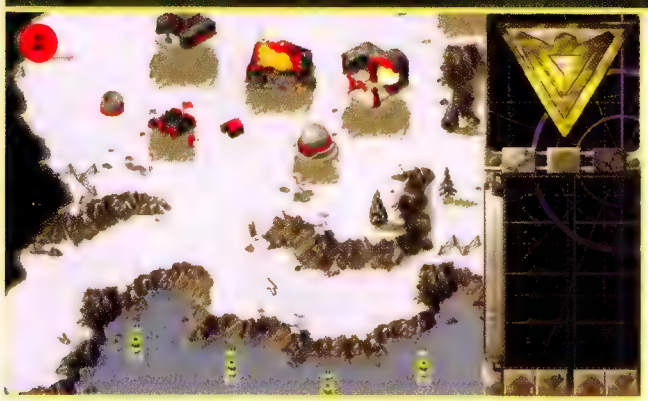
Drawing the enemy in and carrying the fight to it

The computer no longer stops stupidly at walls; in fact, it goes after them with a vengeance (sandbags are now particularly useless for defense). In fact, it goes after them so single-mindedly that you can use sandbags to draw an enemy force to its destruction. First, build up some heavy defenses like turrets and pillboxes (Allies) or flame towers (Soviets), preferably setting up a "killing zone" at the head of a restricted area like a bridge or canyon. The numbers and types of structures to use depends on the forces you plan to deal with; obviously, a few tesla coils would help. If you have the time and forces, intersperse the defensive buildings with troops and perhaps some tanks, backed up with artillery/V2s behind the defensive line. When you see an enemy force formed up but not assaulting, you can start building sandbags or barbed wire and place them in a line towards the force (remember, it doesn't have to be contiguous). Eventually, a piece you put down will trigger the AI into its assault, and the computer will chew down the length of your line of sandbags … right into the killing zone you've set up. If you're particularly snappy you can sell off each sandbag element just before it's destroyed, thereby recouping some money; the next one in the line should still be close enough to continue to draw the enemy on.

You may be able to use the same trick without the line of sandbags. Instead, try sending some troops or units towards the enemy force, then retreating them towards your defenses. In some areas this won't work, however, because the AI appears to be set to defend an area and will eventually break off a pursuit. If this is the case (it will most likely happen if the mobile forces are set to defend the enemy base), you could consider sending in an ore truck; they'll almost always draw the attention of the computer, and they're tougher than just about anything you have. I don't recommend this, however, unless you have a repair bay, plenty of ore, and at least one other truck active.



Soviet torpedoes can be used to take out an Allied naval yard as well as Allied shipping; defend your yards against such attacks with rocket infantry



[1] Be sure to defend your base against air assault as well; use a mix of weapons to deal with both the aircraft and any paratroopers or pilots that make it to the ground

[2] Allied long-range naval fire can be devastating, yet surprisingly vulnerable to assault by grenadiers along the shoreline

The old *C&C* trick of building a line of sandbags up to an enemy base and then plunking down a bunch of gun turrets no longer works; apparently in the time of *Red Alert* they haven't figured out how to make power flow through sand! Don't toss out the tactic yet, however; if you've got a healthy supply of ore, you can instead build a line of low-cost buildings (like ore silos or kennels) up towards the enemy (or to an area you wish to guard, like a river ford or an ore field). Because base buildings no longer have to be contiguous, this isn't as expensive as you might think; you can usually put two or three spaces (if a diagonal is involved) between each building, and they take almost as little time to build as the sandbags. Like the sandbag line, once you've got the line of buildings going you don't have to maintain the whole line; instead, you can sell off some of the buildings at the start of the line even as you're extending the end (the line of buildings "caterpillars" across the landscape). If the enemy base has defensive weapons as well, be careful that your line doesn't extend too far, or they might start zeroing in on your building line before you can plunk down defensive weapons. You may also need to send a guard force of heavy vehicles and troops to protect against mobile enemy units. Make certain you will have enough power for the buildings you put down before you need it, *especially* if you're using Tesla coils; there's nothing worse than plunking that final defensive building down and having it not work due to lack of power (all the more reason to have the protection of some troops and vehicles). *–Scott Udell*

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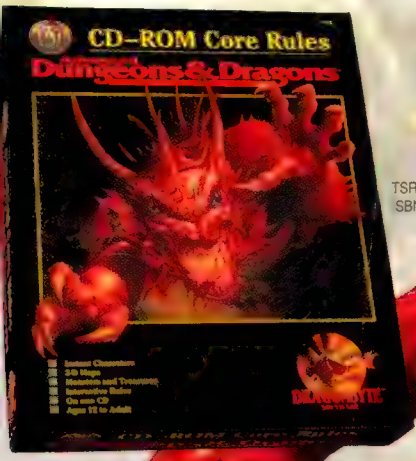

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Master of Orion II

Strategies for the galactic bureaucrat

Managing an empire in *Master of Orion II (MOO2)* can be a daunting task, given the number of decisions the game requires the player to make. In this installment, we present some general strategies for colony management and diplomacy. *Note:* this article assumes all technologies can be made available to the player. This is obviously true if you are playing a Creative race; if you are playing a non-Creative or Uncreative race, it is assumed you can steal, capture, or trade for technologies which you need but cannot research directly.

[1] **A new Auto Build colony with a pre-loaded industrial build queue**

[2] **A factory world; note the complete lack of agricultural production**

[3] **Use colony leaders to enhance production in your important systems**

Staking your claim

The basic strategy of *MOO2* is simple enough: expand or expire. You will need well-developed colonies –lots of them – to mount an effective campaign against your opponents. In addition to keeping you competitive in the research and production race, a larger empire is better able to rebound from losses, especially the ones arising from those pesky Antaran attacks. Knowing *when* to begin colonization is a tricky matter. If you are provided with a colony ship at the beginning, scout all accessible systems before using it. Colony ships are so expensive that building one too early can leave you in a catch-up situation for the rest of the game. Colony bases cost only 40% as much as colony ships; if production is tight, consider using them to colonize other planets within systems that you already occupy.

Bigger is Better is the basic rule of thumb when selecting colony sites. Production is awarded per unit of population, with additional per-unit bonuses awarded by certain buildings. The more people you can cram onto a planet, the more you'll be able to extract from it. This simple fact is one of the things which makes the Subterranean racial characteristic (which boosts maximum population) so powerful. Unless you have Planetary Gravity Generators, be careful of production penalties caused by gravity: A 25% penalty is acceptable, but a 50% penalty is probably not worth the trouble.

A word about outpost ships: these are good in a number of ways, and not just for colonization. First, they extend your exploration range, bringing more planets within reach. Second, outposts can be used to claim planets you intend to colonize later in the game, keeping opponents with Non-Aggression Pacts from grabbing them first. You even get a free Marine Barracks when an outpost is colonized. Finally, outposts can be used as decoys to draw Antaran attacks: Place one around an uncolonized world in a system where you already have a colony. Now your colony has only a 50% chance of being attacked the next time the Antarans come a-calling; the outpost might be attacked instead.

One size doesn't fit all

You can squeeze the most out of your colonies by specializing them according to mineral abundance. Rich and Ultra Rich worlds are obvious sites for heavy industry: you'll want Automated Factories, Robo Miner Plants, and Deep Core Mines, if you can get them; at the same time, you'll need to reduce the enormous amounts of wasted production caused by pollution. A Pollution Processor and Atmosphere Renewer will eliminate a great deal; later, a Core Waste Dump can be used to get rid of it all. Use a Labor Leader to increase production in your best factory worlds.

Apart from providing a ready source of ships and spies, a dedicated factory world can be further specialized to serve other useful functions. If the output is channeled into Trade Goods and funneled through revenue-enhancing buildings like the Spaceport and Galactic Stock Exchange, the result is a "bank world," which can produce a great deal of money. Add a Financial Leader for extra cash.

A factory world can also serve as a baby mill: build a Cloning Center, add a Medicine Leader to boost population growth, and channel production into Housing. Ship batches of three or four workers to new colonies to help populate them quickly; use the baby mill's high population growth to replenish them quickly.

Large Poor and Ultra Poor Terran worlds are very useful for food production. Fill the planet with farmers, add a Farming Leader and a dash of Soil Enrichment, and *voilà!* an instant breadbasket world. Later on, pop in a Weather Controller for even larger harvests. Use these worlds to feed your other colonies, freeing their citizens for other important work; any excess food is sold for money.

Large Poor and Ultra Poor worlds which can't be farmed effectively can still be used as science planets. Build Research Labs, Planetary Supercomputers, and later, Galactic Cybernets. Assign the population to research, and bring in a Science Leader.

Use Biospheres to expand the maximum population of all your planets. Terraform them later, to increase their capacity further. Build Recyclotrons and Astro Universities on your more populous worlds. Build Autolabs *everywhere*: at 30 research points each, they're just too good to ignore. Morale bonuses have a positive effect on all forms of

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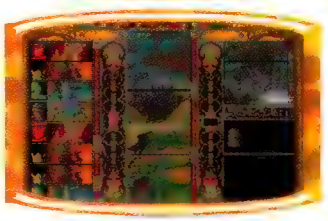

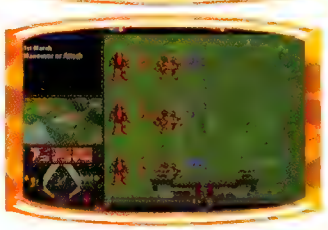

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production – food, industry, research, finance – so take advantage of morale-raising buildings and achievements like the Virtual Reality Network, which boosts morale by 20% in *all* of your colonies. Place Spiritual Leaders to boost morale in high-production systems, where they will do the most good. Eliminate morale penalties wherever they occur: build Marine Barracks on new colonies if your government is Feudal or Dictatorship, and replace lost Capitol buildings promptly. Do not mix races within a single colony.

About mercenary leaders: unless you're happy with the set you have, leave one Colony Leader and one Ship Officer slot open, so that new candidates will present themselves for hire. Even if you reject a leader, he'll still hang around for 30 turns; you can dismiss him from the Leaders screen to free up his slot. *Always* hire a leader who comes with a technology attached: you can then immediately turn around and fire him, and you'll still get the technology for nothing more than the leader's hiring cost – which could be zero, if you have Famous leaders on your staff already.

Moving in

To build up new colonies as quickly as possible, first concentrate on creating a solid industrial base. Make your initial colonist a worker; bring food in from your breadbasket worlds, and extra workers from your baby mills. Be sure to have enough freighters on hand: one for each unit of food you need to import, and five for each colonist in transit. Reserve extra freighters for population expansion. Your first building should be an Automated Factory, followed by a Marine Barracks, if necessary. Then follow up with a Pollution Processor, Robo Miner Plant, and Atmosphere Renewer. Build a Spaceport if maintenance costs are an immediate concern; otherwise, use your monetary reserves to rush the new buildings into service.

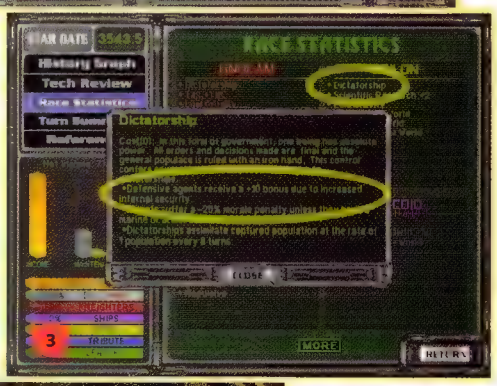
Once you have obtained a large number of colonies, the micromanagement required to keep them all running at peak efficiency can make the game rather tedious. You can use the Auto Build feature to put your less essential colonies on autopilot. The main drawback of Auto Build is that it is not very good at establishing new colonies from scratch. Too often, the computer begins construction of high-cost defenses before any sort of industrial base has been established, greatly increasing the time it takes to get the colony up and running. However, you can seed the build queue manually with a starter set of industrial buildings before pressing Auto Build. Your selections will be built first, leaving Auto Build with some factories with which to build its beloved Battlestations.

I love you, you hate me: that's diplomacy

At the Average difficulty level, diplomacy is reasonably effective. Enter into Trade and Research Treaties with as many opponents as you can. Trade for technology you need, but be prepared to receive poorer technologies than the ones you offer. Enter into Non-Aggression Treaties, but unless you're in a desperate military situation, avoid Alliances – unless you *want* to be dragged into wars with the other computer players repeatedly.

At the higher difficulty levels, the diplomacy deck is stacked against you. Your opponents generally don't like you to begin with, and like you even less as time passes. The basic role of diplomacy at this level is to keep your opponents from stabbing you in the back until the time arrives when you can do it to them. There are two things you can do to forestall the inevitable declarations of war: the Xeno Psychology achievement provides a 30-point diplomatic bonus; and leaders with the Diplomat skill provide an additional bonus. This can be enough to keep your non-Repulsive neighbors at bay—until one of the other computer players frames you. Once relations sour, they are almost impossible to mend.

Forget about the Council vote as a diplomatic tool, at any difficulty level. Voting for or against a player appears to have no effect on your relations with them; having favorable relations with a race does not translate into a favorable vote when the Council meets.



[1] **The human, playing as the Gnolams, has a spying bonus of 37%, and a defensive bonus of 35%**

[2] **The Psilons' technology will improve their spying and defensive bonuses by 45%**

[3] **The Psilons' Dictatorship government increases their defensive bonus by an additional 10%, for a total of 55%. The Gnolams lag this figure by 18%— they won't be making off with any Psilon goodies today!**

[4] **The Gnolams confront the Psilon ambassador**

I spy (and so do they)

Spying bonuses are very important in this game. Even a small relative difference between your bonuses and your rivals' can mean the difference between security, and being robbed blind by other players. A gap of 10% or more usually spells trouble, so be careful not to fall behind, especially if you have technology you want to protect.

The problem with espionage technology is that if you need it, you're not likely to be able to steal it successfully. You may be able to trade for it, but the safest course is to research it yourself. Leaders with the Spy Master ability will add to your spying bonuses.

You should try to have at least as many spies in the defensive pool as your opponents are pitting against you. Even allies will spy upon you, so beware. Check the Races screen regularly for spy activity, especially if you refuse an opponent's recent offer to trade you for some technology; they may decide to just steal it from you. Use the diplomacy screen to challenge any opponent who sends spies against you; more often than not, they will back down. If not, an Assassin leader can be used to eliminate enemy spies at random. *–Lee Johnson*

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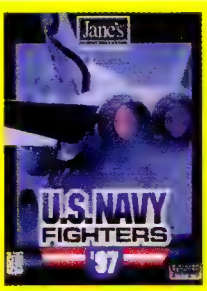

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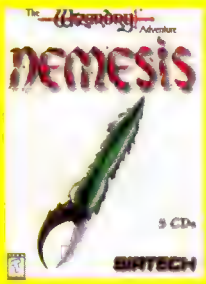

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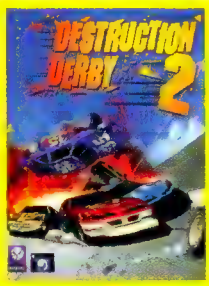

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STRATEGY

Cheat Thrills

Give me lens flares or give me death

While spending this month reviewing every game which came into the office (not true – many of these were holdovers from previous months), I decided to scour the Internet for opinions on Psygnosis' *Destruction Derby 2*. It had been out for a couple of weeks, and I wanted to see if people shared my rather low opinion of the game. What I found was thoroughly depressing.

"Oh no, not another depressing column. I needed a double dose of Prozac after reading this month's *Command Post*," you say.

Sorry. It's been a depressing few months for gameplay. This was only confirmed after my Alta Vista search yielded about 70 messages about the game.

"Great," I naively though, "Plenty of useful tidbits about the game. I wonder if people found it as hard as I do? Am I alone in my dislike of the car model?" These were my only questions, all I could ever hope to ask for (well, I was hoping to be added to the "Warez" mailing list). Alas, it was not to be…

After scanning the messages, I realized every single one dealt only with how the game looked on their machine. They were all comparing the game's performance with their hot new 3D accelerators, and talking about how wonderful the transparent smoke was, and how high-resolution mode was blazing fast on one guy's 200 MHz Pentium, while it chugged on the other guy's 150 MHz Cyrix. They compared framerates. They compared polygon counts. They compared lens flares. It would be easy to make some sort of high-school locker room analogy, but I shall nip that in the bud right here (no pun intended).

I wanted to scream, "Hey, uh, guys. I dig 3D stuff as much as the next guy, but what about the gameplay? Did you get into gaming just to watch transparent smoke on your PC? Have you forgotten why you play these freakin' things in the first place? Hello, is there anybody out there?"

We're headed down a dangerous path, again. Gameplay is taking a back seat to technology, just as it did a few years ago when the CD-ROM first hit the market. At that point companies decided that what we really wanted was to watch bad movies with bad acting and bad writing on their PCs. Today the motto seems to be "Put a decent 3D engine and multiplayer play in any crap design and sell a million units; if you build it, they will come."

Better yet, make up some new technology for your 3D (maybe nib nurbing blip-mipping tri-lateral bisecting polygonal bitmap filtering), create a web site hyping your technology, put out a groovy demo, and behold, insta-hit. The magazines will jump on it like flies on… sherbet, as we just love to show off our, uh, knowledge of this technology (when else can we use the word "nurb?"). You'd think this stuff was as important as the appearance of a likeness of Mother Theresa on a cinnamon roll in Tennessee ('tis the sad truth – was in *USA Today* on 12/30/96).

Destruction Derby 2: Lens flares and transparent smoke, oh my

I hate to pick on *Destruction Derby 2*, because there are so many games which are guilty of overdoing the "cool 3D effects™," but wouldn't it be wonderful if the few precious CPU cycles left were used for credible AI opponents, rather than transparent smoke and lens flares? Each of these features could have been integrated into the game. If an accident generated a lot of smoke, it could force the player to grit their teeth and drive blindly through an accident scene. A lens flare could have reflected on your windshield during the race, temporarily blinding a driver, just as it does in real racing.

However, I don't want lens flares when they're not going to be used for anything more than eye candy. I want every visual trick to have an impact on gameplay, not just be something to help the marketers sell the "immersive™" qualities of the game. It's enough to make a person depressed.

Finally, on a more positive note, keep those votes coming in on a mascot for the PC. Votes have been tallied for Lara Croft, Jazz Jackrabbit, Duke Nukem, "The Doom Guy™," and, of course, Beavis and Butt-head™ (they're everywhere). Operators are standing by at **splus@together.net**. *–Steve Bauman*

CHEATER

SkyNET

Press ALT \ and then the following codes…

ARNOLD	All weapons
SLUGS	All ammo
SUPERUZI	Get the superuzi
SURGERY	Full health
ILLBEBACK	Level warp
WILLNOTSTOP	God mode
NITROUS	Stop time limit

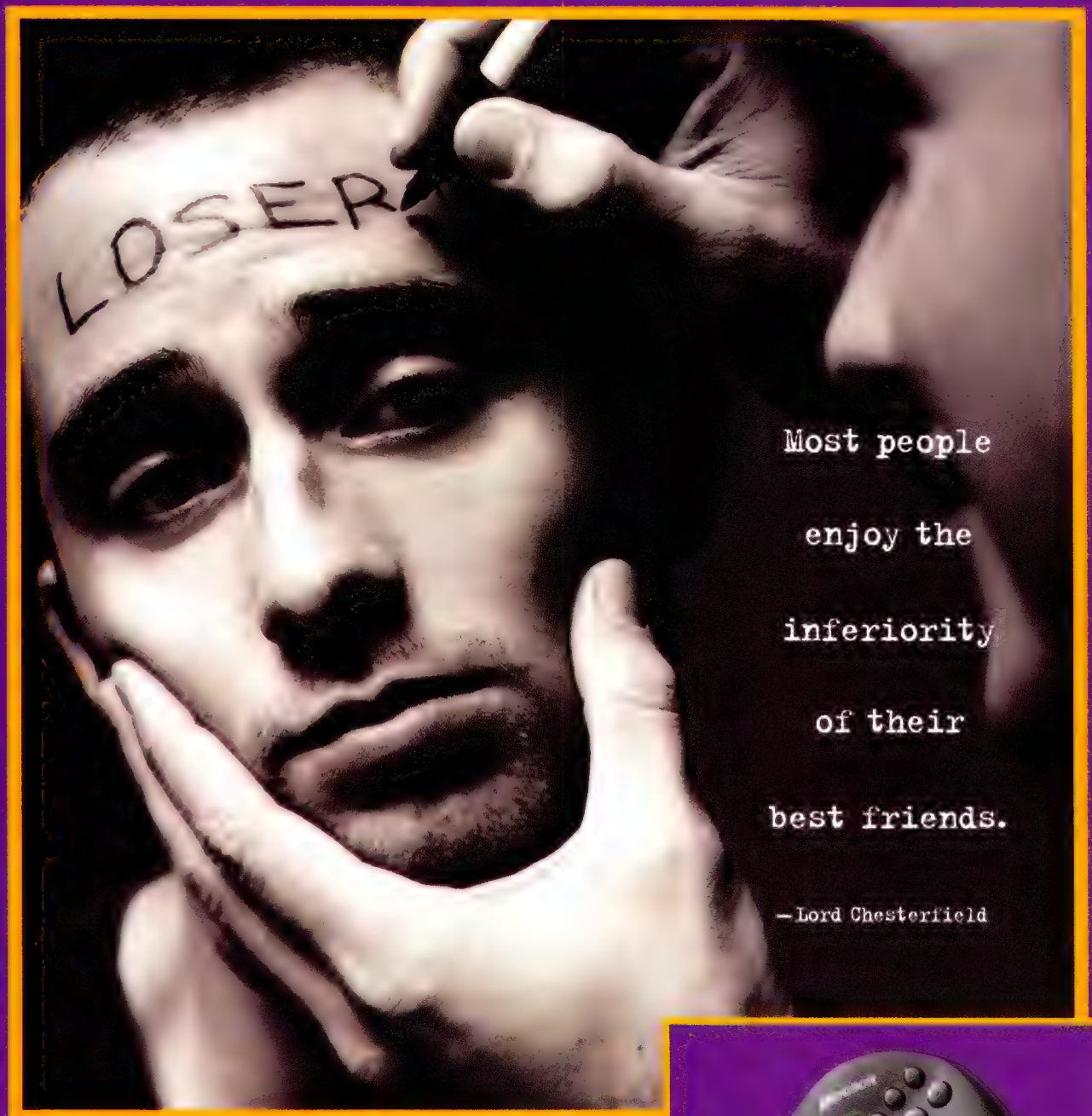
DeathDrome

Enter the code to start on a different level

2REVOLT	The Abyss
3ACCUSED	The Outpost
SHORT4TIME	Citadel
5GETAWAYS	The Inferno
BOLT6DOWN	The Wall
ARREST7	The Spike
LASTMEAL8	Purgatory

Destruction Derby 2

To access all of the tracks, start a full season as **MACSrPOO** *(it's case sensitive). Quit back to the main menu and practice any races on any of the tracks. Looks like we've found an ex-Apple stockholder at Psygnosis. Happy crashing.*



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Back for multiplayer mayhem

SkyNET

Bethesda Softworks

DOS

★★★☆☆

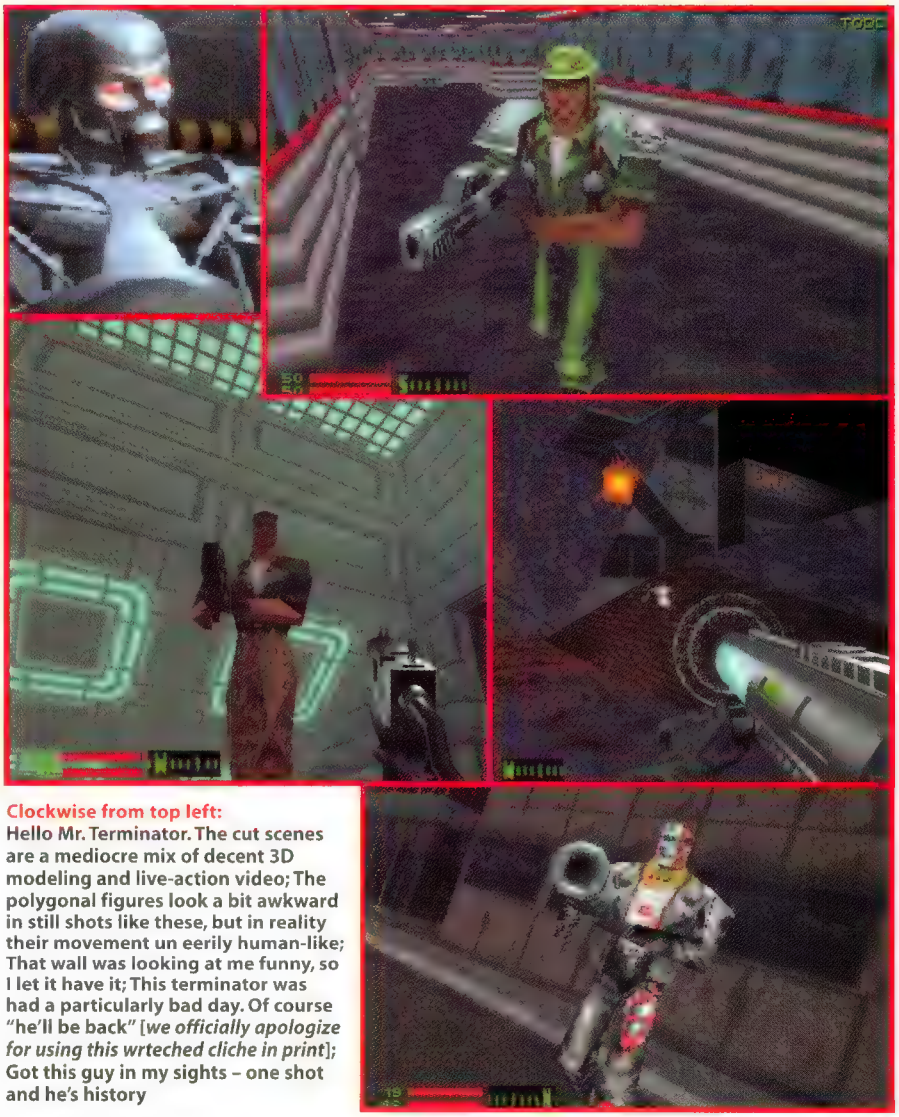
It's time to face the truth; much of what made *Quake* so groundbreaking was already present in Bethesda's *Terminator: Future Shock*. That game, released nearly a year before id's splatterfest, featured a polygonal environment and innovated the use of the "mouselook" interface (something id acknowledges). However, it lacked the multiplayer play that would have given it long-term legs (it was promised, but never delivered, much to the chagrin of many owners).

SkyNET remedies the situation. While featuring an all-new set of solo missions, multiplayer play has been made the big draw of the game. Though it lacks the requisite modem play, it works over the Internet via Kali, though it hasn't caught on there like *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Descent* have.

In multiplayer mode, you can choose from eight different characters, including an actual Terminator robot. Where the multiplayer game excels is in tension; there are so many areas to snipe at your opponent from that you'll be creeping through back alleys, avoiding the main roads. Motion detectors can be used to track players, but only if they're moving (Terminators always appear, though this negative is offset by their stronger armor). Less patient gamers will opt for the all-out deathmatch style of play, never mind they're missing out on the one unique gaming experience this title has to offer. However, with 17 weapons and plenty of ammo, they're more then welcome to blast the hell out of each other.

In single player mode, full-motion video mission briefings (with the usual poor quality) set up advanced-sounding missions. They only sound that way, because in actuality they play out as linear mazes, substituting simple objectives for keys and doors. What saves them from being too repetitive are the vehicles you get to control on some of them. You can drive a jeep or fly an H/K craft, with each delivering enough of a different gameplay experience to make them interesting. They suffer a bit from the mouse and keyboard controls, which work just fine when you're running around blasting 'bots, become too twitchy when flying or driving (i.e. you'll run into a lot of things driving the jeep around).

SkyNET utilizes an all-polygon engine, though the polygon count appears to be lower and the texturing is not as interesting as that found in *Quake*. Unlike that game, switching to high-resolution mode doesn't bring out more detail in the textures – they remain rather gray, with little detail (at least *Quake* looks suitably gothic and scummy). There's also a lot of pop-up of distant buildings, and Bethesda doesn't use fog to mask this common problem. Like all products based on their Xngine, performance is a bit sluggish on all but the fastest machines, and clipping continues to be a problem. You'll often find yourself entering solid objects, like hills, and occasionally taking damage. You can also end up in locations that are impossible to exit (like on edges of buildings, where you can't move forward or back), a problem that was present in *Future Shock* as well.



Clockwise from top left:
Hello Mr. Terminator. The cut scenes are a mediocre mix of decent 3D modeling and live-action video; The polygonal figures look a bit awkward in still shots like these, but in reality their movement un eerily human-like; That wall was looking at me funny, so I let it have it; This terminator was had a particularly bad day. Of course "he'll be back" [*we officially apologize for using this wrteched cliche in print*]; Got this guy in my sights – one shot and he's history

Other problems include poor movement AI for the bad guys. The opposing robots attack you mindlessly (which may be in keeping with the game's fiction), and have problems getting around things like poles and rubble. You can trap robots behind objects easily and then lob grenades or pipe bombs at them. There's little variety to their attack patterns, so it usually just comes down to spotting them and running backwards while firing at them.

Bugs have been a problem with the last few Bethesda games, and *SkyNET* is no exception. A patch was issued a mere week after the game's release, and it fixed a number of niggling problems and added a few new features gamers asked for. Despite what some may say, Bethesda is one of the few companies which really listens to feedback; along those same lines, special mention must be given to their well written and designed manual. You asked for it, and you got it.

Overall, *SkyNET* is only a slightly improved version of *Future Shock*, a game that, even if it was ahead of its time, wasn't particularly earth-shattering. The network play redeems the title quite a bit, but if you're only interested in solo play, you're better off with some of the competitors. While long on atmosphere (the music and ambient sound is particularly good), it lacks the polish and technological advances of its competitors. *–Steve Bauman*

Daytona USA

Sega

Windows 95

★★½☆☆

Back in the 1980s, converting arcade games to the home computer systems made a lot of sense. Games were less complex, and the computer conversions of games like *Joust* or *Pac-Man* were able to replicate the arcade experience, and no one bitched about shallow gameplay. When arcade visuals took off, personal computer game designers focused on giving more in-depth game experiences.

Now the conversions are back. *Daytona USA* manages to duplicate the visuals of the arcade game, as well as the gameplay, but on your tiny monitor the whole effect, that visceral arcade experience, is lost. It's a bit like watching *Independence Day* on your 19 inch TV versus watching it in all of its full-screen, THX stereo glory at the local multiplex. Suddenly you're focusing on how mediocre the whole thing is, and how the setting does a lot toward delivering the experience. You can't help but feel you're missing something.

Daytona USA is a direct port, so it ships with the same measly three tracks, which doesn't compare favorably to *Screamer 2* (which is half the price) or *Need for Speed*. You're missing the booming sound, the giant screens and the linked machines (no multiplayer is supported). As for the gameplay, the steering has an odd feeling, tuned more for the console-style digital gamepads than PC analog joysticks. Your car tends to right itself too easily, and the power-sliding feels computer, rather than physics, controlled. Overall, it doesn't feel bad; it just doesn't have any feeling.

On the plus side, the visuals are stunning, running in 16-bit color with blazing fast speed (at least in low-resolution mode). The sensation of speed is incredible, especially when you choose one of the in-car camera angles. The tracks are entertaining, and there's plenty of fast action.

There isn't much depth to *Daytona USA*, and the thrills the game offers are short-lived. While the arcade game is geared toward short and simple gameplay designed for maximum replays (and profit), that paradigm doesn't work well when transported to your PC. Short and simple equals shallow and repetitive. *–Steve Bauman*

Destruction Derby 2

Psygnosis

DOS, Windows 95

★½☆☆☆

It was hard not to like, if not love, the first *Destruction Derby*. Crashing cars was, and is, a complete blast. Its main criticism was that it was a bit shallow – all of the tracks were too flat and short. Enter the sequel. It does all of the above. And it's a catastrophe. Where did it all go wrong?

First off, the car model that was so endearingly unrealistic (but felt *right*) has been tweaked, and the results are terrible. It hasn't been made more realistic – it's probably even more fake, with extreme sensitivity at any speed, a ridiculous propensity to roll when any contact is made with the side of the vehicle and an overall feeling of twitchiness. The Windows 95 version is particularly uncontrollable (install the DOS version and you'll be much happier – the frame rate is better as well).

◀ Daytona

▼ Destruction Derby 2

ZPC ▶

The game is almost comically difficult. On the easiest skill level it's nearly impossible to win any races, except for the tracks where the staggeringly stupid computer-controlled cars will self-destruct by repeatedly running into walls (they don't really brake for turns). The cars are not only stupid, but they go faster and handle better than your car ever will, making come-from-behind victories an exercise in futility.

The "Destruction Derby" races, the best part of the original game, have also been butchered. The new tracks are excellent additions, but, like in the original, all of the cars only attack yours. Worse, though, is that now it's in such an aggressive fashion it's nearly impossible to survive for more than a minute.

The wonderful console roots of the game force you to load your configuration every time you start (it always defaults to keyboard control) and enter all names with the arrow keys (selecting each letter one at a time – the PC has a freakin' keyboard – let us *type* our names).

It looks like most of the development time was spent adding superfluous 3D effects (look, a lens flare… transparent smoke) rather than evolving the gameplay. Overall, *Destruction Derby 2* ranks as one of the year's bigger disappointments. *–Steve Bauman*

ZPC

Zombie

Windows 95, Macintosh

★★½☆☆

The concept sounds intriguing. *ZPC* matches the cutting edge visuals of artist Aidan Hughes, whose 30's-style cover designs for the industrial band KMFDM led to his creation of some animation sequences for MTV, with the music of Paul and Roland Barker (of Ministry and Revolting Cocks). Throw it into a violent, first-person fantasy 3D shooter with sort of a pretentious pseudo-biblical storyline and you have the game that draws in that magical crossover audience of jaded MTV-addled hipsters and computer gamers. Both of them.

But seriously, the problem with a great concept is that it tends to take priority over actual design, because that concept is always lingering in the back and the creators know it will at least partially distract you from the mediocrity of it all. In other words, you can't play a concept (though some multimedia producers insist on trying). With *ZPC*, the artwork which looks so incredibly original and inventive in the cut scenes (and in the superb packaging) turns out to be dull and monochromatic as textures, and the garish colors and patterns are guaranteed to induce a serious migraine after only a few minutes of play. The mix of 2D art in a 3D environment doesn't really work.

Promising "Revolution, mayhem and destruction!," *ZPC* is anything but revolutionary, using Bungie's dated 3D engine from *Marathon 2* and adding very little to the genre. The engine's leisurely pace (think *Duke Nukem* on Ritalin), while fine for the more puzzle-oriented play found in all of the *Marathon* games, limits the amount of mayhem and destruction the game can generate. The weapons are mundane, the AI of the opponents is non-existent and nothing beyond the visuals and the music is of note (pardon the pun). On the plus side, eight

realms are included, each with three levels, thus providing lots of potential gameplay.

Nothing's inherently wrong with *ZPC*, other than the fact that plenty of games are out there with better gameplay and graphics. It's got a better concept. You decide what's more important to you. *–Steve Bauman*

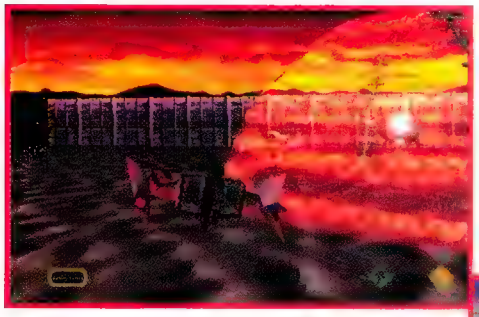
Slamscape

Viacom New Media

Windows 95

★☆☆☆☆

As the only game in memory that requires two megabytes of video RAM to run, one might think that there was something, somewhere worthwhile in *Slamscape*. Wrong. This is one of those semi-rare games that has a gamer scratching his head wondering: a) if the people who made this game actually play video games and if so did they actually play this one before releasing it, and b) who could have thought of such a thing to begin with? If totally flat landscapes, useless weapons, absurd enemies, frustration and a craft that controls like a super-ball that overdosed on flubber appeals to you, then by all means seek this game out.



On the upside, with all the graphic settings turned to maximum, *Slamscape* PC does look better than the PlayStation version, and plays equally as, well, bad (this is the only game around where bouncing off of obstacles at agonizingly precise angles is a requirement for advancement). And of course, the CD includes three music videos by the alternative rock group, God Lives Underwater (don't ask me who they are, all these bands seem to sound exactly alike...). The game hypes "fast-action gameplay inside an interactive soundtrack," and true to form the in-game music is lousy as well. Avoid this game, there are other forms of more productive gaming torture out there. *–Jason D'Aprile*

Rocket Jockey

SegaSoft

Windows 95

★★☆☆☆

Take the first original idea for an action game seen in years (imagine that) and release it too early in order to cash in on the holiday shopping season and you have *Rocket Jockey*, a game which is both entertaining and frustrating in equal measure. A couple of months of extra work would have made the difference.

A spectacular surf-music soundtrack (featuring the legendary Dick Dale, but how the music fits in with the 1940's look and feel of the game is something of a mystery) gets the adrenaline pumping as you strap on a rocket to compete in races, score goals or knock opponents off their own rockets. You have some control of your craft, but most of your maneuvering is accomplished by shooting cables at stationary objects, causing you to swing around them (your proximity to the pole will determine the speed with which you circle it). You can also attach to other riders and drag them around (which is oddly appealing) or to bombs, swinging them around and releasing them so that they strike an opponent.

The physics are impressive, and the unique gameplay is winning. It's hard to say just what exactly the game is like, perhaps a mutant version of *Joust* in 3D, or, on the consoles, *Jet Moto* for the Playstation. It's incredibly challenging (perhaps *too* challenging – the learning curve is too steep), and eminently entertaining.

◄ Slamscape

▼ Rocket Jockey

The performance of the game is sluggish, but looking at the visuals it's hard to see why. While certainly attractive, they aren't visually impressive or complex enough to warrant such extreme system requirements (it chugs a bit in high-resolution mode on anything less than a Pentium 133). Technical problems occur just in the process of getting them to appear on the screen. Absent from the final release is 3D accelerator card support (the game uses RenderWare as opposed to Direct3D). Apparently, it works with Rendition-based cards (untested), but the game doesn't work at all with a 3DFx card. Upon contacting SegaSoft to check on these problems, the representative hung up on us after we requested help (this after spending about 20 minutes entering demographic information via the phone's touchpad).

Ultimately frustrating, all that can be said is that *Rocket Jockey* could have been one of the better action games of the year. The gameplay is exciting and the concept original, but the overall judgment of the game is severely impacted by technical glitches, poor support and, with promised network play promised as a patch, a feeling of being rushed out the door to cash in on the holiday feeding frenzy. *–Steve Bauman*

Power Rangers Zeo Versus The Machine Empire

Bandai Digital Entertainment

Windows, Macintosh

★☆☆☆☆

Acclaim finally has some competition. In case you weren't aware, they're famous for turning every license into the same game. That game, the combination "run, jump and fight" game, has gone out of fashion faster than the Macarena, but they've kept on churning 'em out, with *Batman Forever* being the latest (and lamest) example.

The competition comes from Bandai, who produce loads of toys for the kiddies to lust over. They've teamed up with Cyberflix to produce *Power Rangers Zeo Versus The Machine Empire*, a game that is everything the TV show is: offensive and inane drivel. You control the Rangers as they take on the Machine Empire over the course of eight levels, punching, kicking, running and jumping over numerous well drawn backgrounds. The animation is choppy, the controls redefine vague and the play lacks the fluidity of a zillion (better) games just like it. The levels which require precise jumping are particularly horrid, even with a top-notch gamepad like the Sidewinder.

▼ Power Rangers Zeo

Parents should be sure to pick this up for their kids, who'll no doubt squeal with delight as they learn the lesson that evil must be pummeled into a bloody pulp in order to be vanquished. Hopefully they'll take this lesson to the schoolyard and use it on their fellow students, thus guaranteeing that fisticuffs will be part of the school experience forever. Bullies, rejoice! *–Steve Bauman*

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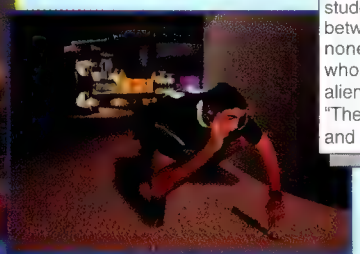
"One minute I'm tearing the wings off flies in my room, the next I'm a space detective for purple people from another planet!" stuttered the stunned high school student. Strangely enough, the liaison between Earth and Armpit VI was none other than Steve Meretzky, whose extensive experience with aliens has been well-documented in "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and numerous other space epics.



Mind-reading mogul Smith celebrates with soused patrons of the Thirsty Tentacle, the bar where he uncovered multiple clues.

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RATING PENDING RP ESRB

Just another CD-ROM game where you're a psychic gumshoe detective trying to solve a murder by mind-melding with drunken aliens.

DeathDrome

Viacom New Media

Windows 95

★½☆☆☆

Do game companies play their own games anymore? With technology getting more press than gameplay, apparently design is now taking a back seat to the latest gee-whiz technology. Should it be any surprise, then, that you can find enormous gameplay holes in a game after a couple of hours of play?

Case in point, *DeathDrome*. It starts out looking like a sleeper and ends up a snooze. Typically, the positive aspects start with the technology – the 3D engine, level design and visuals make for a varied and good looking game. The gameplay, a sort of a 3D deathmatch on cycles thing, puts players in an arena linked by a central room, each armed with a laser weapon. In each of the rooms you can find additional offensive and defensive power-ups. Initial games show a lot of promise, with a high degree of challenge and entertainment. And then it all falls apart.

The game puts all of the vehicles in the central room at the start of the level. However, you'll notice that you can attack the other computer-controlled vehicles in this room; mysteriously, they fail to fight back. In fact this seems to confuse them, as they sit there and absorb your shots without firing back or deploying their sole defensive weapon until they explode. Once destroyed, they reappear a couple of seconds later in the same room, meaning you can camp out and pick them off continuously, until you've destroyed enough to advance to the next level (the exit just happens to be in this room as well – using this technique, you can clear a level in about a minute).

It's astonishing such an obvious flaw was overlooked. The easiest way around this, other than creating actual AI, would have been to make the central room a safe room, where you couldn't damage your opponents. This would force the player to actually play the game the way it was intended. As it stands, though, *DeathDrome* is too flawed to even consider. *–Steve Bauman*

◀ DeathDrome

▼ Xenophage

Xenophage

Apogee

DOS

★★½☆☆

Apogee, the industry's home for goodness and moral decency, has finally gotten around to releasing *Xenophage*, their delayed 2D fighting game. This is their second fighting game (remember *One Must Fall*?) and it contains the biggest characters of any PC fighting game in existence, close to the biggest characters next to *Tekken* on the arcade and console side.

The four button control is somewhere between *Street Fighter 2* and *Mortal Kombat*, and as PC fighting games go, *Xenophage* is a fairly entertaining example of the genre. Most of the characters are outrageously alien in nature and look good, though the animation is a bit stiff (has anyone made "Mannequin Fighter" yet?). The special moves are okay and playability is decent, though nothing near what one might call dangerously innovative. Or even just innovative.

The game plays poorly under Windows and won't accept the Microsoft Sidewinder GamePad under DOS. It requires UNIVBE for high resolution mode and the differences between that and low-resolution is minimal. While playing, the game has a tendency to jump around too much (all that zooming and hurling…), and unlike *Pray for Death*, the music is more annoying than ambient.

Xenophage doesn't have any state of the art playability, but it *does* have eleven huge characters, is quite playable and on the whole isn't nearly as heinous as expected, just mindless fun. *–Jason D'Aprile*

Ashes to Ashes

Corel

Windows 95

★★☆☆☆

Yet another giant software company decides to go gaming. If you love *CorelDRAW*, there's no guarantee you'll care one iota about *Ashes to Ashes*, a 3D action game which takes place outdoors in eight different environments. For all of its claims of 50 levels of play, it really comes down to the same gameplay on either the green level, the white one, the red one, etc.. There's no fundamental difference between them, with no changes in physics or tactics to consider. Every level feels like every other level, and none are terribly exciting to begin with. You can, in the game's favor, find vehicles lying around and control them, but again, there's no physics to let you feel like you're piloting a vehicle. It just feels like you're walking in mid-air.

Visually, the game's actually pretty good, with a flight-simulation style polygonal terrain with bitmap objects and bad guys. The baddies seemingly have no AI, attacking mindlessly until you or they are dead. There's no multiplayer play and inexplicably no saved game (you can restart on a level once you've completed it). The MIDI music is incredibly bizarre, moving from science-fiction style pieces to incredibly out-of-place carnival-sounding music. It's best left turned off.

▼ Ashes to Ashes

This is a curious game, one which leaves no real impact. It works, and does what it set out to do, but overall it lacks that gamer's touch to give it an extra boost to help it stand out in a sea of mediocre 3D action games. *–Steve Bauman*

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PC Gamer, Feb. 1997. 80% Rating.

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Syndicate Wars

Mission breakdowns for budding hooligans

Other than explaining 976 numbers to your spouse, there's precious little that's more difficult than making it through *Syndicate Wars* in one piece. No amount of weaponry, shielding, or luck can equal the value of good old inside information. You have qualms, you say? Good. They'll look real nice on the riddled bodies of your agents. Listen up, and you'll make it through the missions just fine.

Remember, there's always more than one way to skin a cat (so far, there are 244 known methods, and counting.) Every solution in *Syndicate Wars* has an equal and sometimes opposite alternative.

Eurocorp missions: Carnage for a better tomorrow

Missions 0 through 7 are mere trainers for the coming storm. Use these missions to familiarize yourself with controls and obtaining cash needed to fund your agents later ventures. Especially note mission 2 (Beijing), 5 and 6, where juicy banks lay waiting for your napalm touch.

Mission 8 is the fulcrum on which the devoted lords are separated from the folks who finish last in the Tinkle Targets Shootout at the YMCA bathroom. The power of persuasion rings true here. Without a band of at least *20* persuaded citizens, the mission is a wash.

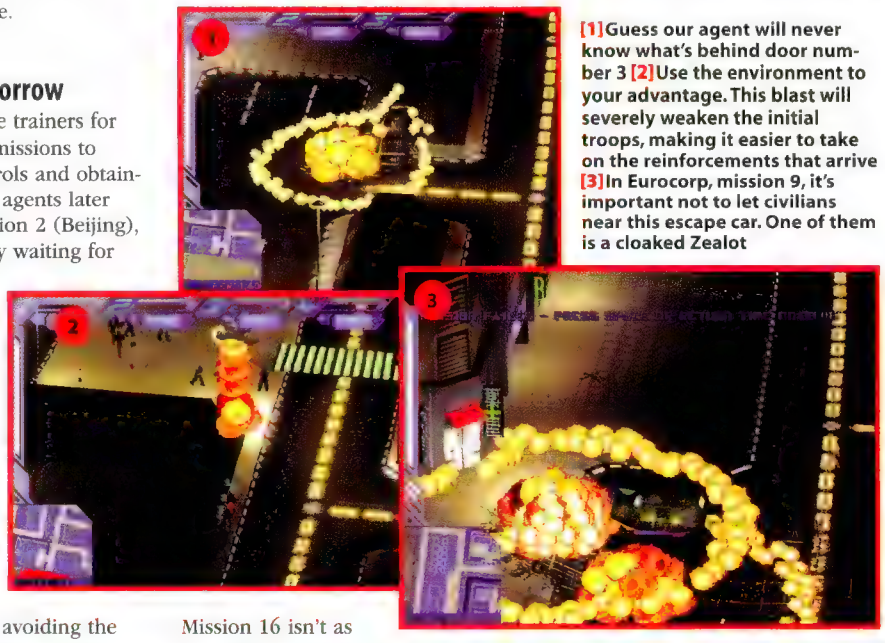
Persuading Jennifer Taks in mission 9 involves dodging from building to building avoiding the flying vehicles. Pedestrians may not be as puny as they appear, so watch out. Hit and run tactics will see you through New York. However, when breaching the compound where Jennifer is holed up, don't stop at the pantry for a few assorted nuts and candies. Get her and get out, because reinforcements are called in immediately.

Proceeding through missions 10 through 12 require the normal seek, find, and kill methods as you persuade scientists, rob banks (you *are* hoarding all the high explosives off the punk bodies, aren't you?) and reach out to Nuuk with outstretched, genocidal arms.

The unique part of mission 13 is that it breaks the rules, dictating the separation of your agents. New tactics are required. Post a couple agents near the executives you're assigned to cover, and the others due north. Like a drama unfolding, the punks will strike fast, and the best tactic is to swap between the long range rifles and launchers. If held at bay, the swarm of enemy will subside. Let the police, who are allied with you in a rare display of humanity, run interference as you sweep ahead of Drennan for ambush strikes near the Data Vault. Once Drennan gets to his destination, you've gotten past the tough parts of the mission.

Missions 14 through 15 are the dreaded escort and rescue jobs that no one really wants, but everyone has to take their turn at. When in danger, when in doubt; hide the client, and shoot it out.

Must have been Family Day at the cruelty corral for someone to throw in a mission with only one agent to fend for itself. Still, Mission 16 isn't as tough as it appears. You need only perturb your target enough to cause her to flee to the IML link. The tough part is keeping your lone agent's torso attached to its limbs. Scam every weapon and don't pass up the medkit. Tubes are everywhere, use them to make rapid progress through the city.



[1]Guess our agent will never know what's behind door number 3 [2]Use the environment to your advantage. This blast will severely weaken the initial troops, making it easier to take on the reinforcements that arrive [3]In Eurocorp, mission 9, it's important not to let civilians near this escape car. One of them is a cloaked Zealot

The fiercest, most wretched fire fights imaginable lie between missions 17 through 19. If you're going to lose agents, it will be on this stretch. Equip with launchers, long range rifles, and Nuclear Grenades to have a fighting chance. Shuttle tubes are best utilized in these missions. Fashion dictates that punks with miniguns are out, and tanks with heavily armed punks are in.

Time to liquidate that IRA account, and sell off your remaining stock options in the herbal phlegm tea market, because from here on out there's no turning back. Buy the best of everything, and stock up to the hilt for missions 20 through 22.

In mission 20, the separation of your agents again dictates unconventional tactics. Thankfully, all agents have additional backup at their disposal. Don't feel remorse about hiding behind the compatriots as they shield much of the incoming heavy fire. After all, they're the equivalent of *Star Trek*'s yellow shirts: they're *supposed* to die. A mad dash for the elevator requires luck, more luck, and Supershields.

The Orbital Station of Mission 21 is fragile. This means retrieving 100% of the dropped explosives, and protecting some strategically placed vehicles. Attacks should consist of rushing in, blasting away with your most precise equipment, and grabbing any leftovers before detonation. Keep alert for terminals, posting agents at the different areas to deactivate the security systems. Weave through the corridors turning off time gates as you access more of the station. Once cleared, it's "Pow! Right to the moon, Alice!"

Church of the New Epoch: Allah needed to know, I learned at confessional

Once again, the initial missions 0 through 4 are but fodder for the bettering of our noble cause. Keep alert for banks, knowing that all will be forgiven. After all, we're the *real* good guys, right?

Mission 5 (Geneva, Vancouver) are lone agent treks that require stealth, not stamina. No weapon will keep the overwhelming enemy forces at bay. Remember that disarming is charming, or at least safer for remaining incognito.

It's a three-front war in mission 6. The key is to make it a single war front. Time for the doctors to do a little bridge work.

No special procedures are necessary through missions 7 to 10. Remember the higher cause of sanctifying the lost: If your enemy is blown to bits, they can't think nasty thoughts. Thus, they're purified by process of elimination. Ingrain this in your mind, young convert. Sanctify and fry. Sanctify and fry.

Nothing like a good old Western bank heist in mission 11. Like any good cowboy, the trick is ambushing at just the right

moment. Don't let the good guys get back in the car, or they'll never get out. Timing is critical. Get to both vehicle destinations first, and stay hidden until the drivers are well clear. Pick them off, and drive both vehicles to the rendezvous. The money obtained is pivotal to advanced research and equipment.

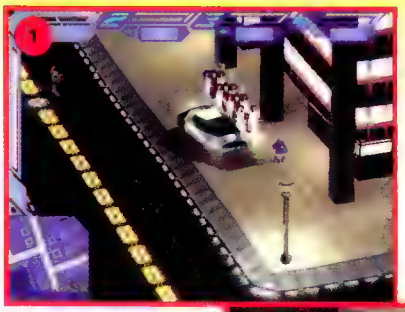
A simple abduction can turn ugly in mission 12 if you're not careful. It's walking on eggs in London. Even a whiff of your weaponry, and the place will be ablaze with target fire, and your abduction scheme goes down like a ValuJet. Arm only for brief moments to take out necessary targets.

Standing orders apply through mission 13 to 18. In each mission, particularly 16, speed is critical. The unexpected Satellite Rain can really mess up an otherwise jolly picnic. Otherwise, it's sanctify as usual.

Flying vehicles will pounce on your Zealots all through the streets of mission 19. The best bet in keeping DeSaxo safe is the rule of thumb to use one Zealot to protect, and three to proceed through the streets clearing out the traps. Hide in buildings as you comb towards the destination point, recharging your shields for certain upcoming attacks by flying vehicles.

Brutal opposition to our holy cause will haunt you through missions 20 to 22. Death is our fortress, and we bring invitations to the masses. Especially in missions 20 and 21, make heavy use of Nuclear grenades, and keep ahead of mobs while targeting them with long range rifles. DeSaxo must be killed on initial site in mission 21, as she'll call in an air strike pronto. You'll never get a second chance to make a deep impression.

Mission 24 is reminiscent of Eurocorp mission 20. Use Supershields to make a mad dash for the central station. Happy Hour at the weapon shop closes in five minutes, so get all the goodies while you can before the mission. Once you've hit the orbital station, it's time to brace for the final onslaught.



[1]"Zealots with pellets" can usually convince an officer or two to loan their cars to the grand cause. Many missions require the use of a vehicle to enter restricted areas [2]The best tip of all is to hit the enemy, wait for their shields to drain while you re-charge, and then blast them while before they're shields recharge again

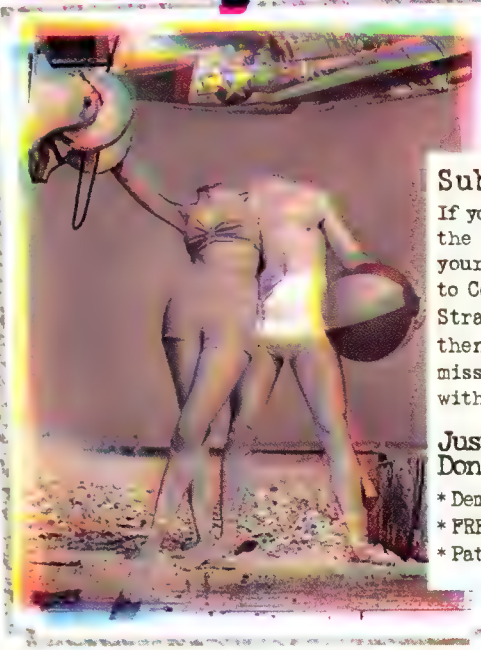
Eight is enough: eliminating the Nine

The last mission is shared by both Eurocorp and the Church. Why? Because despite their squabbles, in reality both sides are really just misguided beings united against the impending syndication of old *Barney* episodes.

Haste makes waste. So hastily waste everybody near the landing platform. Run quickly towards the west to give yourself distance, and make the spider droids a priority. Weed down the rearward enemy forces, but don't hesitate. There's precious little room for error.

Blow a hole in the compound (preferably on the north or south walls,) and let the bloodbath begin. Knock out as many of the Nine as it takes to get the Gravitron Gun. It's a seeking weapon, so don't wait for line of sight. Fire continuously as you plod forward through the compound, killing the rest of the Nine. This is it, so don't hold back. Retreat is out of the question. With endurance, skill, and a little luck, you'll defeat the dreaded Nine, save the planet from utter decimation, and still get back to Earth in time to catch the *X-Files*. *–Tim Royal*

Missing Something?



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Road to Nowhere

At the movies – or not...

Once more, it's a New Yawk-accented list of the "yagotcha"s: Yagotcha Gaffer, yagotcha Dolly Grip, yagotcha 2nd Assistant Director, yagotcha Hair Stylist for Mr. Segal, yagotcha 3rd Assistant Camera (Kenya location), yagotcha Best Boy, yagotcha Worst Boy and on and on and on... Popcorn, anyone? Howzabout an oversized $4 Coca Cola? Hey, is that Gene Siskel over there? Oh, no. Sorry. That's no Siskel, that's your wife; and far from the downtown cinema, you were simply clicking the Credits icon in *Phantasmagoria 2*.

We've seen the industry courting full motion video interactive movie games for some time now, and their presence seems to ebb and flow a bit — like Jim Varney movies, the spaghetti western or Fluffernutter commercials. Today's technology makes it possible for game developers to deliver cinematic spectacle like never before. All the major players have studio locations, be they for motion capture or for fully produced video extravaganza.

From time to time we see recognizable names in the casts of multimedia games. I suspect that agents and actors alike find this relatively new medium a more or less dignified form of exposure, not quite as hot as a guest appearance on *Friends*, but somewhat above the commercial endorsement of salad dressing. The same can probably be said for the host of supporting personnel necessary to get one of these productions off the ground (in some cases barely).

So. Now that all of these high-falutin' special effects and video possibilities exist, and would-be filmmakers are climbing the fences for opportunities to get their feet wet in multimedia, and that with a large enough production budget, game companies (many whose roots are already *in* the film industry) can offer what some might consider near-film-quality productions — so...what? Yes, they *can* create a movie-like experience. The question becomes, *should* they?

Consider the full motion video interactive movie adventure game. Is it alluring? Is it impressive? Does it simulate a theatrical experience? More importantly, does it provide adequate gameplay? Or is it just so much rigmarole in a pretty package, with a recognizable name or two plastered on the cover? The obviously important gameplay question is the hardest one to answer. Of *course* a game must provide adequate gameplay. But just what *is* good gameplay? It's certainly a matter of opinion. Mine is that gameplay must be *truly* interactive at least 80% of the time for the product to remain interesting. As for the other 20% — go ahead, impress me with frills, special effects, and cut-scenes. I play games so that *I* may be an active participant, not so that I can sit back and watch what is usually a second or third rate video clip for fifteen minutes at a time. I know I'm not alone. Those who disagree are also out there, however, watching *Phantas 2* with their popcorn and spouses in hand (!). And to them, *that* is good gameplay.

Clockwise from top: FMV works well for transitional cut scenes in *Command & Conquer*; *Borg* is nearly 100% FMV; *The Pandora Directive*–where blue-screen means blue-screen; Interminable conversations between Trevor and Curtis really stunt the flow of *Phantasmagoria 2*; Adrienne is dismayed that budget constraints relegated her forever to that orange knit shirt

Because home computer entertainment is far from as pervasive as television (at least for the time being), the budgets allotted for film production in games *can't* be as high as is necessary to provide true quality entertainment. As a result we see things like Christopher Walken in *Ripper* prance through a performance from hell because either a) they couldn't afford a real director or b) they couldn't afford Christopher Walken for more than one take per scene; or Adrienne in the original *Phantasmagoria* having zero costume changes. These are just small examples of things which most probably wouldn't/couldn't happen in even a small-budget film or television production.

Ken Williams, king of Sierra has said, "I will gladly pay more for a better game (but) cost creeps into the equation in that live action costs so much that you can't give as much gameplay as I want." How does this affect his plans? "Roberta and I really enjoyed *Phantas II*. Unfortunately, it is Sierra's last movie game for many years to come. Even though *Phantas* was such a hit — and advance orders on *Phantas II* indicate it also will be, live action is not cheap to shoot. This industry really isn't big enough yet to support the big live action projects like *Phantasmagoria*."

Good for you, Ken. In light of the current size of the industry, your view of what the audience is seeking probably reflects the clear picture that if we want to see a movie, at least for the time being, we'll...(gasp) go to the movies. And if we want to play an interactive game, we'll...buy *Red Alert*. Only kidding, Ken. See you at the movies. *–Cindy Yans*

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Boots of Re

Unca escapes Exile's underworld

African Dragon (the dragon who still thinks he's Bogart)

The mother of all hurricanes swept me from Beata and next thing I know I was floating in a muddy river and being pulled by a rope tied around my neck through tangled reeds! At the other end of the rope, up to her waist in water, was a skinny human female wearing a white dress and a floppy, large-brimmed white hat.

"Where am I? Who are you? What's going on?" I managed to rasp out.

"Africa, Kate Heartburn and we're going to be married."

"Married?"

"Finders keepers."

Hot & not

In December, *Daggerfall* was still the top role-playing game. Then came *Nemesis* and *Albion*. Strategy role-playing games abounded with *Master of Orion II* the master over *Heroes of Might and Magic II*, *Blood & Magic* and *War Wind* (*all* highly recommended).

Lighthouse, *Timelapse*, *Circle of Blood*, *Harvester*, *Leisure Suit Larry 7*, *The Neverhood*, *Rama*, *Titantic*, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Toonstruck* were all equally popular puzzle-adventures. *Tomb Raider* (my favorite) was the best action-adventure.

Exile: Escape from the Pit (part three)

Exile is an excellent shareware role-playing game but with throwback graphics. Available from http://www.outreach.com/fantasoft.

To escape Exile talk to Malka in Dharmon, then ask Royce in Blosk and Calder in Bargha about "Scimitar." Dharmon and Blosk are west of the Castle. Bargha is at the northern end of the Abyss (go up river to the northlands then walk west to find a secret door).

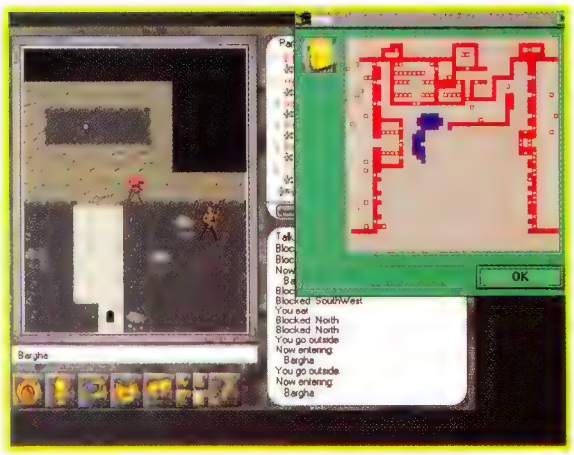
Outside of the bar in Bargha (west then north) find a secret passage to go downstairs. Say "Phaedrus" to Cleese. The Gremlin Cave (Cave of Spirits) is east of Fort Spire (at the southern end of the Abyss). Use Group Scare to keep the Gremlins from stealing all your food.

Search for secret doors in the north end of the cave and go through the teleporter. Search for a passage in the southeast bedroom and go through a second teleporter. Find the Orb and break it (don't look at it).

There's a secret door south of the orb leading to a teleport. Pull the hidden lever behind the north wall. Go through the teleporter beyond the southeast bedroom again. Return to downstairs Bargha and ask Cleese about "Phaedrus" and "Scimitar."

Go to the east side of the Arena in Spire and ask to "enter" the games. After fighting four times ask Scab (in the bleachers) about "steal." Search the canyons west then north of Spire to get the Tiny Key.

Ask Scab about the "circlet, Meena, failed and steal." Go to Cotra and ask Asp about "circlet" for a password. The Silver Circlet is behind a secret door northeast of Spire. Go to the northwest corner and go through another secret door to get it.



The secret entrance to Bargha

Visit Athron the dragon, in the Honeycomb west of Mertis. Search the south coast across from Cotra for a swampy area. Explore the area to find Athron. He will give you the first part of a password. Aimee has the second. Find her north of Pyrog's lair on one of the northern islands. Ask Erika (go to Erika's Tower) in the far west about "syllable" to get the third part. You'll have to give Hathwisa some Graymold Salve to get the fourth.

Ride the Gremlin teleporter

Enter Erika's Tower by taking one of the giant's boats and going down river (west then south). Enter the tower from the south. Go through the first gate, kill the two goblins and take the middle passage north (secret door).

Ask Phyllea in Fort Draco (use a magic map to find her on the north side of town) about "Cortath." She'll direct you to the salve recipe (in a ruined hut across the bridge and south). The gray mold is on a sandbar at river's end in the northlands.

In the far southwest of Exile, through a cavern west of Fort Remote is Sulfras' lair. Ask Sulfras for "permission" to go east (you must have the circlet and onyx scepter). Follow the canyon to the cave entrance (Final Gauntlet), search for secret doors and buttons. Run across the second bridge to your right after pushing its button. In the Summoning Room travel by boat over lava to push the final button. Exit through a secret door in the north end.

The Tiny Key is here

Näkemiin (a Finnish farewell)

Next month, we'll wreak revenge on *Exile's* Evil Empire. In the meantime write to 71202,3451 on CompuServe or 71202.3451@compuserve.com.

–Andy Backer

The final button in the Summoning Room

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Designed for Microsoft Windows'95

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

The Doctor is in

The Time Warp of Dr. Brain

Sierra On-Line

Windows, Macintosh

★★★☆☆

While working on his Space Time Discontinuum Theory, Doctor Brain has ended up trapped in ten different time periods. Get enough points in each era, and Dr. Brain will be freed and returned to the present. Yes, it's another hokey premise for yet another link in the what's starting to become a slightly strained chain of *The* <whatever> *of Dr. Brain* games.

The choice of puzzle activities is loosely linked to Dr. Paul McLean's Triune Brain Theory (which discusses the evolution of the human brain), and Dr. Howard Gardner's

▲ The Time Warp of Dr. Brain

Theory of Multiple Intelligences (which identifies five kinds of intelligence, in addition to the verbal and logical/mathematical ones to which our educational system caters). As esoteric as this may sound, it does not impinge on the light-heartedness with which the puzzles are presented.

When compared with the *Lost Mind of Dr. Brain*, however, *Time Warp* comes up a bit stale. Several of the arcade challenges, such as underwater cave spelunking, beaver dam-building and the Primordial Soup section's "cell wars" are single-note activities which become painful to play and replay enough times to complete the activity. A freshly conceived Alchemy section has potential, but the step-by-step processes used to generate solutions are slow and interminable. In a word building puzzle, the Monkey See Monkey Do section's dictionary is sorely lacking (don't hold your breath, *Wordtris* fans), and you can argue with the machine all you want that *certainly* the word you just made is real...to no avail. On the other hand, there is a wildly wonderful auto-demolition Gridlock logic section, which is almost worth the entire ticket price. The music, 3D spatial positioning, and futuristic Space logic sections are also outstanding.

The packaging *still* offers a lower age boundary of six years old, but it's hard to imagine a six-year-old completing even the novice level. Although it's not the standout its predecessor was, *Dr. Brain* fans will be pleased. And some *new Dr. Brain* fans are likely to emerge. *–Cindy Yans*

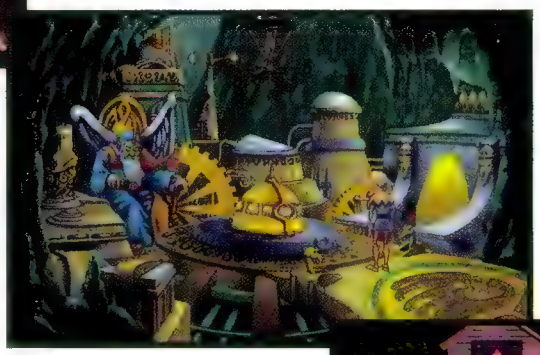
Fable

Sirtech

DOS, Windows 95

★★½☆☆

Once upon a time in the village of Balkhane, a young hero by the name of Quickthorpe set out on an adventure to slay four demon beasts and to retrieve the four jewels which would restore the harmony of the land. He travelled through worlds of ice, mist, water and fire and met many interesting and humorous characters along the way. As he traveled through lush graphic screens drawn by an ex-Disney animator, he stopped to listen and marvel at the sounds of the birds chirping in the forest (and other ambient sound effects). He also learned that all things



▲ Fable

are not as they seem in the world of *Fable*, for he was but a pawn in the treacherous plan of an evil priest, as others had been so long ago.

Fable is an average, run-of-the-mill fantasy adventure with superb graphics, charming characters, and just the right touches of humor throughout. There are no complex puzzles here; it's just a matter of collecting items, combining some, and using them at the right time. The interface is simple; the game uses both left and right mouse buttons effectively. However, unlike some fantasy adventures, which auto-resurrect the main character, our hero is not so blessed. The four worlds are small, so there is no tedious wandering to get from point A to point B and back should you miss a critical item. Be forewarned, though (maze haters unite!): there is a maze which must be navigated (fear of all fears) more than once.

When last we left our hero, he had discovered his role as a sacrificial pawn. But alas, all is not well in the land of game endings. If you want to be a hero, don't answer an ad for a job in Balkhane. *–Janet Blackburn*

Uncle Henry's Playhouse

Trilobyte

Windows 95

★★★☆☆

While the animation and rendering for Trilobyte games has always been top-notch, some might argue that the core of what they do best in the area of actual game design is puzzles. If you enjoyed those in any of Trilobyte's three adventure games (*7th Guest, 11th Hour* and *Clandestiny*), and hated having to wander through story to get from one to another, well, here's an inexpensive opportunity to get all of Trilobyte's puzzles so far in one place, without any extra play-time overhead.

The one negative here – and it's a big one, for some players – is that these kinds of graphics-intensive puzzles too often put the player in hurry-up-and-wait mode, as one animation or another crawls towards completion (the animation, though smooth and fast, can sometimes take a few seconds to conclude). The first time around you might enjoy watching the pieces animate in a puzzle; the second or third time, though, you just want 'em where you put 'em. Some of the puzzles are worse in this regard than others; the cake pieces and the wind-up mouse puzzles are two of the more irritating examples, whereas the Go game with the coins and the spider game are perfectly fine.

▼ Uncle Henry's Playhouse

As with *Hodj 'n Podj* and other such collections, the main gaming advantage is the quick, simple play. There's certainly a niche for these kinds of brain-teasers; and they definitely function better as a compilation on their own than they do as show-stoppers in the middle of an adventure game. *–Steve Wartofsky*

Sacred Ground

Activision

DOS, Windows 95, Macintosh

★☆☆☆☆

Sacred Ground is the second installment in Activision's full-motion-video *Santa Fe Mysteries* series. As in the first game, *The Elk Moon Murder,* you and your Native American partner, Detective John Night Sky, have five days to solve the case.

Randa Tasker, wife of a wealthy developer, has been kidnapped. What is her husband hiding? Is there a possible connection with the suspected arson at Randa's leather goods business? Could this be a retaliation for the expansion of Martin Tasker's ski resort onto Native American lands? What about the estranged daughter, the jealous lover, the doctor's unrequited love for Randa, and the excess funds which seem to be in the possession of the resort's project manager? All fuel for a soapy plot which never does generate enough suds to clean, or steam, your monitor screen.

The video and graphics are excellent and the acting is above par for the FMV game genre, but there's nothing new or interesting here. Gameplay, if it can be called that, is overly simplistic. Choose a suspect or informant from the aerial photo-map of the town and then proceed to watch video clips of the interview; order an alibi verification if you deem it necessary. Gather clues, it's obvious whodunit, arrest suspect, watch ending video and drag the files to the Recycle Bin.

Activision subtitled *Sacred Ground* as "Never Disturb the Spirits." *Elk Moon* failed miserably as both a game and detective fiction. Activision should have taken their own advice and never disturbed the spirits of Santa Fe again.

And why did the ending bring back memories of *National Lampoon's Animal House?* Hmmm...food for thought here. *–Janet Blackburn*

▶ Sacred Ground

▼ Derrat Sorcerum

Derrat Sorcerum

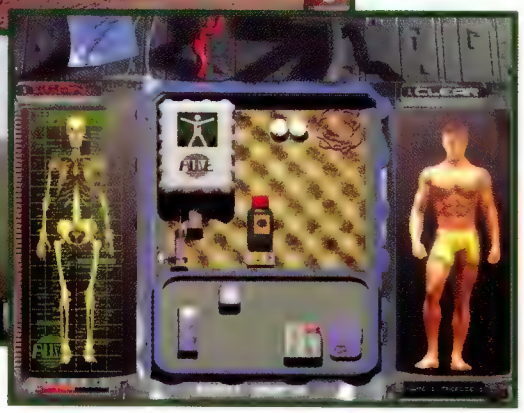
Mixed Metaphor

Macintosh

★☆☆☆☆

In *Derrat Sorcerum's* on-disk instruction manual, read the comments portending trouble: "Unlike other CD-ROM adventure games you may have played, *Derrat Sorcerum* takes place in the third person. You can see your character." How shocking! Yes, there's been a shower of first person adventure games lately, but this overlooks that the genre was founded on the likes of the *King's Quest* series. This careless attitude must have carried over into the beta testing of the game.

The adventure is set in the land of Teraknorn, where becoming a mage may or may not be "the thing" to pursue. The game begins with the player assuming the role of a budding spellcaster, Corin. Emerging from a test of apprenticeship, Corin finds that the rest of the magical university of the Crimson Tower has been decimated. He then sets out determinedly, to find out what happened.



▲ Deus

Derrat Sorcerum is an interesting attempt to use a video-captured main character set against photo-realistic three dimensional backgrounds. The software promises "...award-winning graphics which surpass any seen so far in a CD-ROM adventure game," but they are at best average and even somewhat blurry. The video integration is well done in the Crimson Tower proper, but upon entering the rest of the world, Corin assumes a pasted-on appearance. The game music is excellent, though, and available for audio-only CD play.

Any chance for real enjoyment is ruined, however, as the full-scale bugfest develops. Pop-up windows refuse to go away, saved games frequently refuse to load, screens go blank, and you'll encounter fatal crashes which require re-installation of the main program files to continue playing.

It may be premature to judge Mixed Metaphor's *Derrat Sorcerum* on these technical faults, but it was premature to release the game for sale. Stay away from this one until it's patched. - *Chuck Klimushyn*

Deus

Readysoft

DOS

★★★½☆

Anyone remember Silmarils' *Robinson's Requiem?* It's baaaack! Well, not really. *Deus* is a brand new, vastly improved game from Silmarils which also takes place on the planet Alcibiades. *Deus* can be played as either an arcade or role playing game, and involves the violent restoration of order at a scientific research station.

The player needs to know something about medicine to survive in the game's role playing mode (the character does not improve statistically with experience; his weapons just get better).

The hero is constantly being poisoned, shot, stabbed, or otherwise mutilated. He starts out with enough medical equipment to treat, sew and bandage most of his wounds, but if he doesn't use an anesthetic on himself he's likely to die of hyperalgesia (abnormally great sensitivity to pain). Twenty-one medical terms are laced throughout the game's manual, describing the different ways the hero can suffer. They include hypothermia, hyperthermia, hypotension, hypertension, uncontrollable hemorrhage and heart attack. What, no hypoglycemia or tachycardia? These guys are amateurs!

If you find the medical terminology a bit much, the character management features can be turned off and the game played in arcade mode. As an arcade adventure, *Deus* is clearly superior to most of what's out there in this genre.

You can make the character walk, run, jump, crawl, climb, swim, look up, down and over your shoulder. Your character will discover various weapons, such as the commando knife, heavy laser, machine gun, pistol, spear, axe, rocket launcher, grenade, mine and paralyzing phaser.

Deus is a highly original arcade/adventure with some of the graphics in SVGA, a fully realized 3D environment and exciting combat; for some, it may not prove a satisfactory role playing game. Written on the game box is the following: *Warning: This game is not easy. It requires strategy and intelligence.* That it does, especially if the gamer wants to play doctor. *–Andy Backer*

Huygen's Disclosure

Microforum

Windows

★½☆☆☆

Perhaps the most chilling moment of *Huygen's Disclosure* from Microforum is the daunting number of ways the title may be pronounced. For the record, it's pronounced '*hoy-gans*.'

As the story goes, the earth (once again) stands poised for destruction from ozone depletion, presumably from the sudden global fad of toasting insects with flaming cans of hair spray. It's up to our hero to find a suitable planet for the remnants of society.

What stands out about the game is its bizarre sense of humor. Space just isn't as dark and sinister when the hero's autopilot belts out, "I'd wish you a safe and pleasant journey, but that just doesn't seem likely."

The entire cast of alien characters are unique and zany, though they all sound vaguely similar to "handy" man Pee Wee Herman at the movies. It's a stretch to call the plot rich, but the story does have a creativity and charm which rises above the level of mediocrity.

Integrating action and adventure in the same game is usually an omen for failure. *Full Throttle* interrupted a smashing tale with crude and frustrating action sequences. *Huygen's Disclosure* follows suit, using a weak action model which doesn't add to the adventure; it crushes it in an irritating and poorly designed manner. Simple activities such as aiming, firing, and moving are tedious and cumbersome. In the end, this "new breed of action-adventure game" leaves you wondering who the first cousins were that bred it.

All this, coupled with the agonizing speed of character movement, the coarse control scheme, and the fact that our protagonist walks like he's never seen a bran muffin in his life, make the game a first-rate attempt with second-rate results. In the end, *Huygen's Disclosure* tries to fit in, but ends up being an outcast wallflower at its own pity party. *–Tim Royal*

Who's Fat Lou?

Mediola

Windows

★☆☆☆☆

What a great name! And its suggested retail price is only $24.99. And you'll play it through to the end, no matter how painful it may be, to find out just who Fat Lou *is*. Trust me, you will; because it's one of those things that becomes obsessive.

You'll plow through all ten locations with five give-the-obvious-item-to-the-creature non-puzzles, two easy puzzles (one process-of-elimination pricing game and one nine-clue crossword), one very difficult jigsaw type puzzle (which you don't have to solve in order to win) and one very difficult endgame puzzle (which you *do* have to solve to win). Yessirree, that's five no-brainers, two yawns and two puzzles — all for $24.99.

El Guapo is a rap-singing dictator in Zett City and has turned life there into a monochromatic nightmare. Your friends have been arrested for various petty crimes by the El Guapo police and it's up to you to travel to location ten (better known as El Guapo's castle) in order to challenge the renegade rapper and beat him at his own rap game. The setting is graffiti-sprinkled Outtadaway Park in which you'll encounter a buxom and bobbling chalk woman ("Play with your *own* piece, you left handed monkey"), a drunken wizard, a psychotic rollerblader ("Mommy *made* me wear her panties on my head..."), and a raincoat clad flasher-cat ("Hey! I can see his thingie!" <all onlookers vomit>). Get the idea? All the sophisticated qualities of Ren, Stimpy, Beavis and Butthead are combined here to offer the player a journey into the titillatingly simplistic with vulgar language galore. Losing the final conflict places you in a jail cell surrounded by inmates making sexually implicit comments about your mighty "purty mouth."

Targeted at teens 13 (!) and up, *Who's Fat Lou?* is misguided, ugly, sophomoric and depressing — but certainly somebody *somewhere*'s idea of a humorous look at the world of "cool urban music." The only redeeming feature? Its simple and cohesive primitive graphics style. The biggest disappointment? You *still* don't know who Fat Lou is. The sequel? Nah. - *Cindy Yans*

◀ Huygen's Disclosure

▲ Who's Fat Lou?

▼ The Lords of Tantrazz

The Lords of Tantrazz

Atlantean Software

Windows

★☆☆☆☆

Forget all you've learned about gaming in the 90s. Disregard the constant cry for substance, thrill, balance, ingenuity, and above all, reason. Just focus on the close-up breast shots and you'll be fine in *The Lords of Tantrazz*, the latest title from Atlantean Software.

Don't worry about the plot; you'll be done with it in two hours, spanning six easy lessons. The toughest puzzle you'll face is keeping the cursor out of the way of the screen captures you're sure to transform into wallpaper.

The background story describes an abused girl turned government agent. Her travels take her to secluded spots around the globe to battle crime armed with only a thong bikini and heels. Where our heroine keeps her weapons and gear is a subject not about to be broached.

The comic book still art composing the game focuses solely on the accentuation of bosoms and bumbums. Unfortunately, it's just distracting enough to feed the guttural instincts of gamers who buy based on daily testosterone activity.

What would a B level game (or movie) be without a B level cameo appearance from the fading beauty of rock and roll, Alice Cooper himself. His paltry sentences in the game should easily raise the price of this timeless gem at least another dime or two.

So are you tired of playing strip Uno with your friend down south? Are you in touch with your inner lesbian.... four or five times a day? Do you dress your Care Bear dolls in drag, and give them names like "Traci" or "Debbie?" Rejoice! *The Lords of Trantrazz* is here to revive your lonely weekends. It's the perfect gift for anyone who's exhausted all the naughty words they could think of between "www" and ".com" *–Tim Royal*

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RAMA

Plaques, plaques, plaques and not a single yard of dental floss

Plaques are scattered around the Central Plains of RAMA on the ground, inside the wheel mechanism, and inside the two buildings, London (rectangular) and Bangkok (circular). If you miss some of them, they will end up in the specimen box, the two trash biot bins, or in the sewage treatment area inside London. You will also want to check the refrigerator whenever you return to the tent site. Who knows what might lurk within.

ISA Hub Camp

The back of the manual contains ten steps to get you started in your explorations of *RAMA*. Once you open your locker, examine the multipurpose tool and cycle through its four options. Look at your arm computer. It will always offer a general or localized map of the current area. Don't forget Puck, your pocket hint guide, in locker nine. When in doubt, always ask Puck. Usually his commentary will be descriptive in nature but sometimes it will contain a tiny clue.

To the right of the locker bank, take the ladder down to the next level. Find Sabatini's keys to the right of the "inactive" sign on the bomb. Open lockers six (wow, Sabatini is a packrat) and seven, then descend to the tent site in the cable car.

Base Camp Tent Site

There is little to do here except that you will want to read your bonus chapter of Arthur C. Clarke's upcoming novel. The specimen box is always important on every visit to this site. Upon exiting, you will be presented with a radar map of the Central Plains. Other than the base camp, there are five permanent sites: beam, London, wheel, Bangkok, and the ice port. The ice port, near the center circle, will be closed to you until you have completed everything in the plains.

Giant Beam Site

After Wilson tells you about the trash and crab biots, check the trash bin for a plaque. Search every inch of ground for plaques and be sure to pick up the red shard as well as the optical lens just outside the entrance to the biot storage shed. There is also a plaque to be found under the giant beam.

Centipede biots roaming the landscape will drop plaques also. If you miss one of these, Nicole will offer it to you later.

[1] Descending into RAMA

[2] Take these specimens

[3] Clean out those trash bins

[4] Map of Central Plains

[5] Map of New York

The force field and London

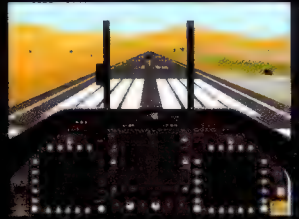
There is a pattern in the energy flow. Time it just right and you will pass through unscathed. Once inside, turn off the force field switch. Hopefully, you have found the right plaque that will allow you to enter the building. After a thorough exploration of the initial room, you should have twelve yellow pattern artifacts in your inventory. Activate and view the display of *RAMA* and the solar system, then place the yellow pattern artifacts on the two boards and assemble them to form a map of the Central Plains and a map of New York.

Place two plaques in the matrix to enter the next door. On the far side of this room, watch how the mantis biot enters the elevator. Find the biot box near the wall and rotate it, noting the triangular protrusion. Switch the multi-tool into flashlight mode and combine it with the red shard. Use your red light on both elevator activators. Don't miss picking up the tile on the walkway as well as all you can find in the sewage sludge. Looks like you will need to find some industrial strength cleaner somewhere.

Return to the locked door to the left of the entrance to this room. On the lower level Puck will tell you that the crane biot is capable of lifting heavy loads. Find the control panel to activate the crane and your worries are over. Take the item that looks like a gold shield (alien palette) from the corner near the monitor. Turn on the monitor and click on

REACH OUT AND TORCH SOMEONE.

F/A-18 HORNET



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it for a close-up view. Remember this picture. You should be met by Nicole des Jardins who will inform you of Wilson's death.

Exit London and look once again at the force field switch box. The biot box will plug into that inset and yield yet another plaque.

Wheel Site

Take the decryption card from Sabatini and use it on the arm computer to decode the message found in one of the lockers. Take the plaque from the trash biot bin as well as others scattered around the landscape. Head toward the noise and find the broken biot and a bent rod. Don't miss the plaque when you turn around. What are those things that look like mini flying saucers? Puck will tell you they are metallic plant life. Take the green plant stalk (metal seed) protruding from one plant. Enter the wheel and walk around the rim until you can enter the door. View both scenes on the monitor and don't leave without the plaque that is lying on the floor.

Why not return to the tent site for a cold drink? Something new has appeared in the refrigerator. Read the label and find out that it was found near the distillation mechanism. Look in the specimen box too.

Check the radar map and look for a temporary site with Wakefield's 009 ID number. Go there and he will give you the last lens for the laser.

Return to the wheel site and place the three lenses in the laser cannon. It will automatically turn and fire.

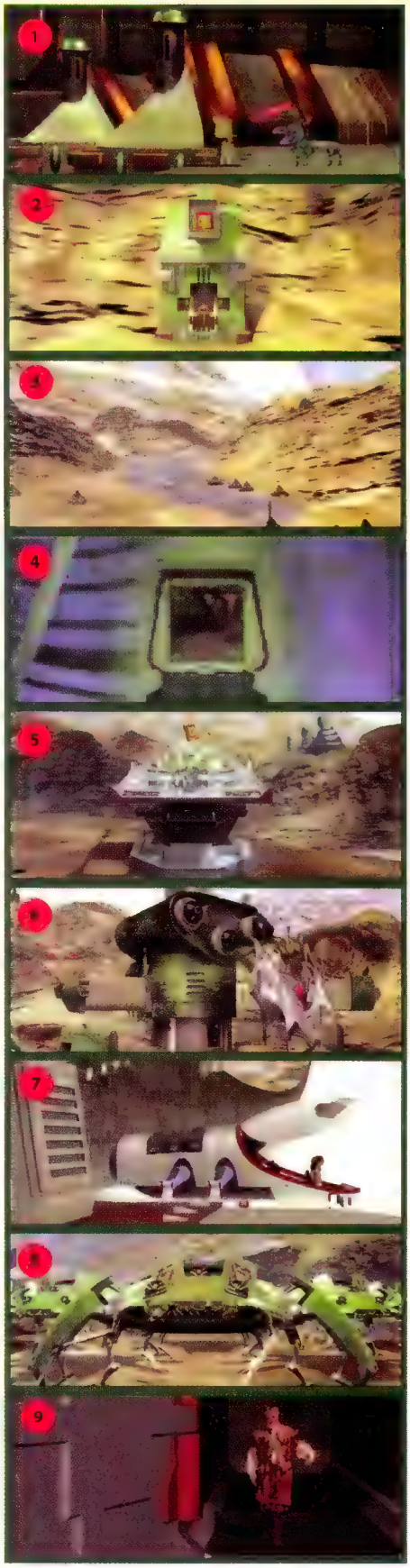
Place the refrigerator item and the plant stalk into the distillation machine. Adjust the wheel until green is showing in the bubble cap. The material in the tube on the smaller machine should now also be green. Press the button to first clean the tray. Now you can clean each of the dirty plaques. If you run out of cleaner and still have dirty plaques, another stalk will grow after a short time.

Return to the biot storage shed. On the way, notice that the laser has melted the plastic cube and you can now take the plaque. Take the gate from the shed; return to the wheel hub and retrieve the blank plaque from above.

Bangkok

Go to the site with the round building. Play with the human number machines and take the red gem from the machine on the right. View the displays in the human museum and proceed to the elevator and another matrix puzzle.

The next level will introduce the myrmicat numbers or base sixteen. Let's digress a moment to a math lesson. Our human number system is base ten. 12345 + 56789 = 69134. When we add 5 + 9 for the first column, we know that equals 14 but we write down 4 and carry 1. Essentially we're saying



[1] So that's how you access the elevator

[2] Plaques...they're everywhere

[3] Harvest that plant stalk

[4] The blank plaque, one of the "keys" to New York

[5] And plaques are laser resistant too

[6] Avian offering

[7] Hitchin' a ride to New York

[8] Staring death in the face

[9] Introducing Puck, your pocket hint guide

that 14 is one base 10 (the carry one) plus 4. So how do we do base sixteen? Simple, the same way we did base ten. Suppose we have 13 + 15 in base 16. That would equal 28 which is one base 16 (carry one to the next column) and write down 12 (28 minus 16). If the next column of figures to the left were 9 + 8 (plus the one we carried), we would write down 2 and carry one for the base 16. With this new found numerical literacy, you can proceed to do the problems in the myrmicat machines. If it is still not clear, resort to the calculator in Windows 95.

View the displays in the myrmicat museum and take the alien cutting tool. Take the elevator to the next level after inserting the correct tiles into the matrix.

The octospider machine will once again tax your numerical capability. This time we are dealing with base eight (only logical for eight-tentacled spiders) and the same principles apply. 10003 + 16777 = 27002 and 17477 + 12164 = 31663 in base eight octospider math.

View the displays in the octospider museum and don't miss picking up the indigo-green jewel.

You should have obtained a red gem from the machine on the right on each of the three math levels. Place these gems in the receptacle in the center of the elevator and take the number box for later reference.

Avian gratitude

Return to the wheel site and use the alien cutting tool on the cable in the broken biot. Use the bent rod to pry the metal biot arms open and free the avian. Take the neck ring that he offers. Go to the ice port near the center circle and hitch a ride to New York and the wondrous world of the avians and octospiders.

If you haven't already, consider rearranging your inventory. Since new items are added at the bottom, place Puck, the jewel, the multi-tool, arm computer, the alien palette, the human and octospider icons, avian neck ring, number box, and the blank plaque in that area. These are the only important items for continued play in New York. All that surplus inventory, and not a single trash biot in sight... gack. *–Janet Blackburn*

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The Hangar

A little bit o' this, a little bit o' that

One of the symptoms, I think, of spending too much time at the computer playing air combat sims is an increasing obsession with realism. You know you might want to leaven your virtual existence with a little dose of reality when such obsessions get out of hand (I'll leave it to you to judge when you've reached that point). Here are some suggestions, both at and away from (horrors!) the computer.

First, I think the operating real-world metaphor for what you're doing when you're in a flight or air combat simulation should extend a little bit beyond the goal of imagining you're in a real plane's cockpit. Like how about radio control model aircraft, for instance? Seamus Blackley (*Flight Unlimited*) suggested this possibility to me awhile ago, and mentioned that it was one of the operating metaphors behind what he was doing when he was busy working on that sim (see elsewhere this issue for news on *Flight Unlimited II*). If you thought along the lines of operating a model aircraft when you flew a PC-based sim, perhaps you'd do things a little differently. Instead of being in the cockpit, you'd be outside the airplane, looking at it from a variety of external views. You'd be learning how to manipulate the view control system from this perspective just as much as you'd be learning how to fly the aircraft, and you'd be judging various simulations based partly on how well the external view controls operate. While a number of simulations provide quite sophisticated external view controls, I wonder whether any have developed the same with the radio control model aircraft completely in mind? You'd need some sort of dynamic external fly-by system, that offered something in between the rapid fly-bys we get with those sims offering this option, and the fixed, static views outside the aircraft more typically available in most sims. Kind of a "virtual radio control" perspective.

This could work really well for racing sims, too – think slot car. How much fun would it be to bring the joys of HO slot car racing to a PC sim? How could you do it so that you'd capture the feel of that kind of adventure? You'd need some way to give the player/user a chance to construct their own track (without the frustrations of that damn yellow guard rail which always breaks), and you'd need to focus a lot more on customizing features for the various cars included which mimicked the kind of customization you do for slot racing – something, in other words, that's real-world but not "realistic" in the usual sense of the term as we use it. A sim with HO slot car racing as its operative metaphor would have to place a lot more emphasis on a simple, effective paint kit (actually, Papyrus' work along these lines is already quite good), and could perhaps be more concerned with the physics and mechanics of slot cars than it would be with real cars. Just a thought.

But I was supposed to get *away* from the PC for a bit

CARRIERS TODAY
Lt. Robin A. Erichsen, the first female catapult officer.
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BACK
FORWARD
Modern Conflict

▲ **Fortress at Sea:** Lt. Robin Erichsen, the first female catapult officer

▶ **Fortress at Sea:** Navigating the carrier gives you a clear sense of the relationships between parts

▼ **Fortress at Sea:** Ladies' Bridge Club one sunny day over the Atlantic

You could be flying one like this right now

HQ: Unidentified aircraft reported in sector 17,17
HQ: Unidentified aircraft reported in sector 17,17
WP 2: course 359 at 20000 ft, ETA 0:53

▲ **Air Warrior II:** Taking on B-17s in a single-player campaign

▶ **Air Warrior II:** The cockpit art is amazingly detailed

▼ **Air Warrior II:** The external artwork for the planes is getting impressive too

here (heellp! Can I? Let's see...). Well, if you're a simulation fan, how much would finding some time to learn about radio-controlled model airplanes or slot cars enhance your enjoyment of PC-based flying and racing? Certainly there's no air-air combat (that I'm aware of, at least) in the radio-controlled airplane hobby; the engines and models are a little too expensive for that (though think of the incentives for learning flight and combat skills such an endeavor might provide!). But learning how to build and fly such aircraft could certainly provide some tips and experience in the area of real-world flight physics, which would certainly freshen the CRT experience quite a bit for those too stuck in the screen. It might also help you bring whole new issues to the table in what you want from a PC-based flight sim; perhaps some things might become more important to you, and others less, than they are now. So, too, with slot-car racing.

From the Coffee Table to the Pixel Screen

In a slightly different vein, the multimedia encyclopedias for air combat simulation fans just keep on coming. The latest high-quality effort is Discovery Multimedia's *Carrier: Fortress at Sea*. More than just another compendium of photos, video and technical information on the world's aircraft and weaponry, this product integrates such information and more around the project of giving the viewer a comprehensive look at the structure and operations of an aircraft carrier (this would dovetail nicely with playing *Jetfighter III*, by the way). You have access to complete information on the command structure aboard an aircraft carrier, from high to low, as well as a nicely organized look at the functions of the various parts of the aircraft carrier, from tower to flight deck to below-deck operations. Making use of the extensive video library Discovery has access to, the software provides a good (if sometimes a bit dark) video overview of all phases of carrier activity. The video is dynamic and relevant all the way through, accompanied by professional and interesting narration. The static graphics and text are easy to navigate around, and are organized intelligently around the structure of the aircraft carrier itself. If you've ever had a hankering to know this stuff in great detail, this would be an excellent place to start.

Air Warrior II – How to Get from Here to There

And just to make sure you're getting the substance you need from this column, I'll finish up with some quick commentary on Kesmai/Interactive Magic's upcoming *Air Warrior II*. I have to admit, I'm usually ho-hum when it comes to online multiplayer combat, but this one has me psyched for the first time. It's a truly credible solo player simulation in its own right, and the designers have finally begun to bring the graphics side of the software up to the point where the experience is no longer as abstract as it used to be. The sound effects are phenomenal, as our reviewers have reported over the past year, and the flight models are quite good. The most exciting thing about this simulation, however, is that it's the first in my experience to provide enough off-line excitement and material to spend time with prior to even thinking about getting into any on-line sessions. If others are like me, the reassurance that this kind of preparation prior to jumping into the hot waters of online competition gives is inestimable. It's also a lot more fun than logging on to be shot down or to stall and spiral in fifty times before getting anywhere. The designers are on to something here; I hope others pick up on this model for multiplayer as well, it could actually get me interested in the idea. Crunch Out. – *Steve Wartofsky*

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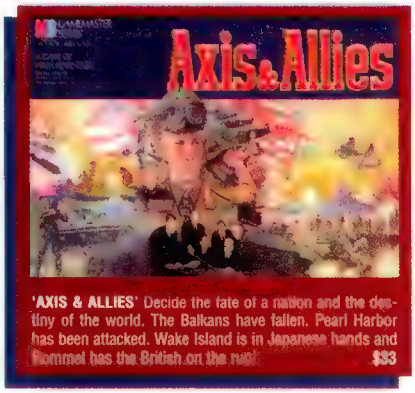

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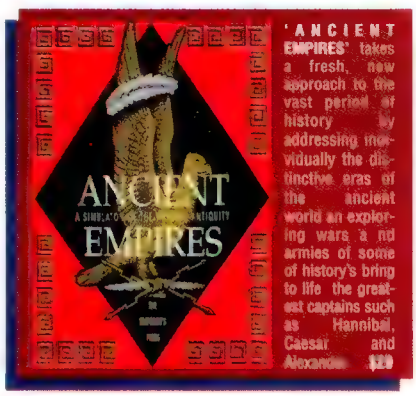

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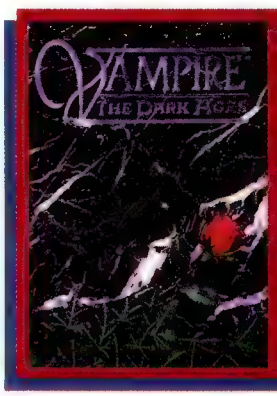

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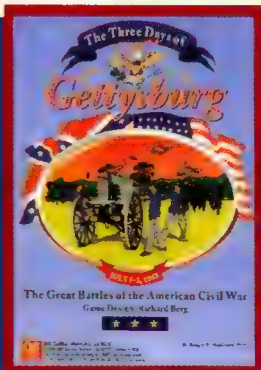

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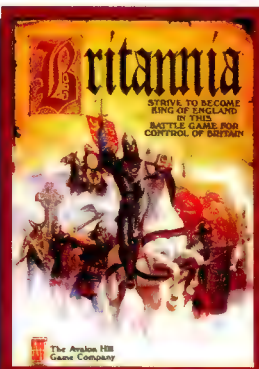

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Air Combat Advisor

Part 3: Boom & Zoom

As we were discussing, it's necessary to understand that the further you dive, the more total E you'll lose. This is the major drawback of the low slashing attack.

Lo and behold

The "low slashing" attack consists of a dive below your target and a climbing attack run at your target. The only "good" reason to use this kind of attack is against a target that (ideally) doesn't have a belly gunner and/or is more or less committed to flying level and not diving for what ever reason (bombers most commonly fit the bill). Again, the disadvantage is that you'll lose the most E with this type of attack run since you dive lower than your target. The saving grace against bombers is that they are usually relatively slow compared to your sleek fighter so "catching up" is less of a problem.

Attack!

Okay, so you've decided on how to perform your attack run. You maneuver your airplane to position yourself so you can fire your guns as you close. One tip I can pass along is that when encountering a bandit in a more or less head on situation, *fire early*. The combined closing velocities will cause the distance between both of you to diminish very quickly. As we've covered in the Attack Stage basics discussions, the two things you need to worry about are the enemy shooting back at you and the possibility of a collision. Be prepared. Beginning your Zoom early can decrease your chances of a mid-air, but there are some other Zoom considerations we should discuss.

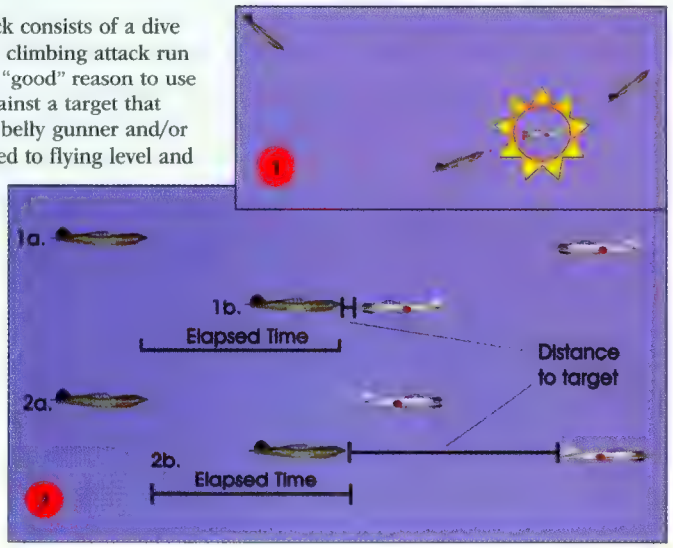
Zoom or doom

We all know that you can trade airspeed for altitude and the Zoom is the perfect example of this fundamental principle. The decision you need to make at this point is how to execute your Zoom. Your basic choices are either to sacrifice airspeed for more altitude (Zoom at a steeper angle), or sacrifice altitude for more airspeed (Zoom at a lower angle). Which you ultimately choose depends on how close your enemy is, his relative E state compared to yours, and what you want to do. Let's talk about what you want to do first.

Reversals of fortune

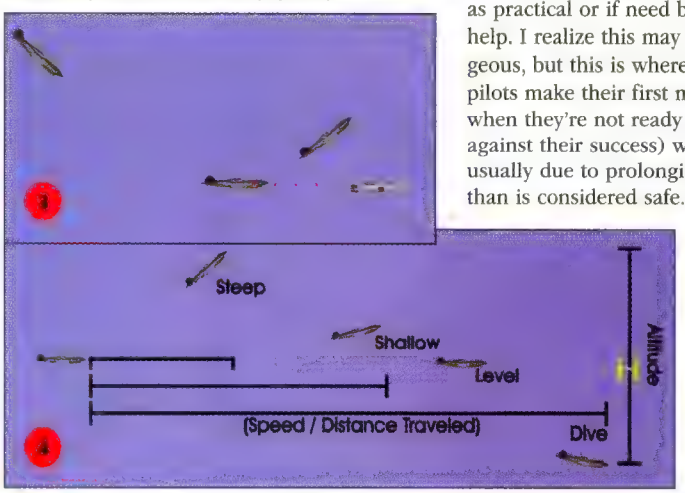
Reversals are basically turns. However, some pilots commonly refer to reversals as changes in offensive or defensive posture. Regardless of semantics, in the case of the B&Z, they are one in the same. But before we actually talk about the reversals themselves, we should cover a couple of basic concepts. There are basically two schools of thought regarding reversals. Some pilots recommend turning back and beginning your next attack run when your airspeed is just about to drop below the minimum airspeed to complete a vertical reversal (we'll get to those in a minute). This is without any regard to the proximity of the bandit. The theory is, at this particular point, you're probably too slow to extend with any great efficiency, so you're stuck fighting anyway.

The other school of thought is to only turn back when you've achieved enough separation (usually about 2,500 to 3,000 yards) to safely perform your reversal. What "safely" usually means is being separated far enough so you can't be attacked by the enemy before you've turned and regained some speed to make your next attack run. Of course the success of either of these options depends on your E level and how you expend it on your zoom. So let's talk about that next.



[1] The "low slashing" attack consists of a dive below your target and a climbing attack run at your target. Unfortunately, the further you dive, the more total E you'll lose

[2] In a head on situation, the combined closing velocities of both of you will cause the distance between you to diminish very quickly



[3] Beginning your Zoom early can decrease your chances of a mid-air, however it will also reduce the time you have to shoot at the enemy as well

[4] Your basic Zoom choices are either to sacrifice airspeed for more altitude (Zoom at a steeper angle), or sacrifice altitude for more airspeed (Zoom at a lower angle). Which you ultimately choose depends on how close your enemy is, his relative E state compared to yours, and what you want to do

Which is best?

I believe the best choice is to make the safe reversal. If you lack the E to do this, you most likely overstayed your welcome already. You probably never should have made that last attack run that got you into this situation in the first place. Nevertheless, let's back up a bit. On your Zoom, you should extend as far as practical or if need be, head for home or help. I realize this may not sound very courageous, but this is where most inexperienced pilots make their first mistake (attacking when they're not ready and the odds are against their success) which in this case is usually due to prolonging an attack longer than is considered safe. Of course there are pilots who are skilled enough to come out of such situations victorious, but for us mere mortals, it's a matter of how much you value your virtual life.

Zoom again

If your enemy's E state is close to yours, you'll want to sacrifice altitude to increase your airspeed. So climb at a lower angle, or if need be, continue your dive. Separation is the most important aspect for your survival when you're showing the enemy your tail. If your aircraft is faster, you can climb later to regain E. More next time.

–Ben Chiu

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A-10 Cuba!

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Activision

Windows 95

★★★★☆

Parsoft is a name not known to most PC gamers, but that may change soon. Activision has purchased the rights to three Parsoft flight sims, and *A-10 Cuba! for Windows 95* is the first to hit the streets. We reviewed *A-10 Cuba!* on the Mac just a few months ago (December '96), and for all intents and purposes this is the same game, so much of what was said in that review applies here as well.

Briefly, this is a fairly hard-core flight sim (with the odd exception that the 'hog will survive an inadvertent touch and go landing with little damage, as when one slightly misjudges the height of a hill) which eschews texture mapping and Gouraud shading for a high frame rate. *Everything* here is a polygon, even the smoke trailing from behind a missile. The environment is very much "alive." As you taxi down the runway, a wing of F-16s will zoom overhead, on their way to some unknown mission. Fly past a city, and see cars tooling around the streets.

The flight model seems quite accurate, with the feel of the plane changing depending on weapons loadout or damage (lost half your wing?). Blackouts, wind shear, sun glare…all the standards are here.

The game's greatest flaw is in the packaging—Activision left out the paper manual (Parsoft's original Mac version *did* have a manual). Once past that snafu, the only possible complaints revolve around the small number of missions and lack of any kind of a mission editor. Multiplayer modes are included, of course. The shaded polygon aspects means that on a P-100 this game *flies* (pun intended). Having this one come in at the same time as *Jetfighter IIII* (which managed about three frames per second on the same system) was an eye-opening experience.

Again, this is all recap. *A-10 Cuba!* was a four star product on the Mac, and it's a four star product on the PC. PC flight sim grognards, meet Parsoft. Parsoft, meet your new audience. Enjoy. *–Peter Smith*

Sim Copter

Maxis

Windows 95

★★½☆☆

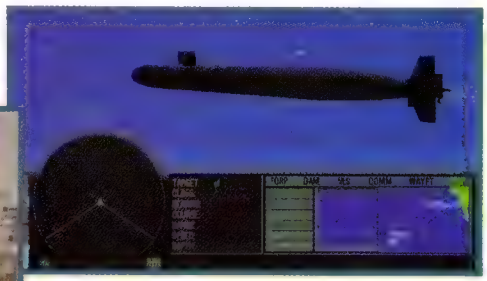
Here's a design with a zillion nifty ideas, amazing features, plenty of "how the hell did they do that?!" but which falls flat on its face *as a game*. Why? Well, you get into *SimCopter* for, say, the first twelve hours. You're hooked… at first. You fly the medevac, police and fire support, rescue and transport missions. You weigh saving some kid who's been injured during a riot or traffic jam (which you disperse with your megaphone) against making bigger bucks transporting a few millionaires to a cocktail party. You watch in awe as your SimCity unfolds in front of you. You pick up a medic, who exits your chopper when you land nearby to round up patients in the medevac missions. You land, get out and walk around yourself a bit. You stop in the middle of a street, watch the traffic approach, then laugh as the cars start honking at you to get out of their way. You upgrade to a Bell, which is faster and can carry more passengers. You flip through the channels of the SimRadio, complete with classical, lite jazz, rock and industrial stations, and weird commercials, done *Sim City 2000* newspaper style. Then, oh then, you ask yourself, "what now?" The game doesn't *go* anywhere. No careers, no medals, no pats on the back, no Welcome to the Next Level, no longer-term *goal* to keep you focused. And, despite the seeming beauty of the idea of flying around your own *Sim City* scenario, the actual practice gets redundant real fast.

Maxis obviously put a lot of time and attention into the details for this software toy; in doing so, however, they've lost the big picture. There's one big problem with *SimCopter*. As Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, California, "there's no there there." Better luck next time. *–Steve Wartofsky*

◀ A-10 Cuba!

▶ SSN

▼ Sim Copter



SSN

Simon & Schuster Interactive

Windows 95

★☆☆☆☆

Obviously someone (or some someones) spent some time getting some of the basic elements of submarine and torpedo performance down right in *SSN*. Obviously, the same talent spent time doing some interesting things with underwater graphics. The game offers some interesting innovations visually, and – despite the seemingly clumsy control (you're always having to correct for excessive dive or climb, or right or left rudder) – something more than a simplistic "point the sub and shoot" submarine model.

Unfortunately, there's not much more than such basics to this game. If you're a huge Tom Clancy fan, perhaps you'll appreciate the extensive and incredibly jingoistic full-motion video segments, offering semi-plausible delusions of potential naval conflict with the Chinese over newly discovered oil fields in the South China Seas (as long as you can get past the feeling that there are a bunch of partially grown-up boys here, just aching to see their multi-billion toys in action, no matter *what* the cause). If you've never seen a sub simulation on the PC, however, this will absolutely swear you off the genre for life, kind of like going on a *really* bad LSD trip the first time you tried it (at least in the latter case, this would be a *good* thing…).

The worst thing about *SSN*, though, is that it might well end up in the hands of a novice PC gamer, someone unaware of other excellent, truly historical and accurate sub simulations such as *Silent Hunter* and *Aces of the Deep*, who'll never look further after fifteen minutes with this product. *Caveat Emptor.* Read the novels instead; they may be just as hilarious in premise, but they're substantially more subtle in execution, at least. *–Steve Wartofsky*

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Hind

Part Two: Shturm und drang– flying in harm's way

Once you've mastered flight and waypoint navigation, get ready to be humbled, because flying in *Hind*'s combat environment can be overwhelming. The action is noisy and frantic, and it comes at you from all sides. By keeping in mind that you're not in a shoot-'em-up, you'll learn to ignore most of the chaos and focus on your objectives. But the real trick in *Hind* is distinguishing the chaos you can't afford to ignore from the chaos you can afford to ignore. It's all a matter of that precious flight sim commodity known as situational awareness.

Your first resource is the mission planner. There are a few things to keep in mind while you're checking the map. You should always consider whether the pre-set waypoints are the best choice. Oftentimes, they aren't. It's important to stay out of enemy territory as long as possible, even if this means taking the long way around through allied terrain. The pre-set waypoints are generally pretty good about steering clear of higher elevations, so be sure to stick to valleys and flat areas if you choose your own path. Not only do higher elevations increase your visibility to enemy defenses, but slopes can be difficult to hug with *Hind*'s austere terrain graphics. You should also follow landmarks as much as possible, because one of the easiest components to lose is your navigation computer. It'll be much simpler to stay on track without waypoint guidance if you have a road or river to follow. Finally, consider taking the time to use the 3D window to do a fly-through of your course. The situational awareness that's so hard to come by in *Hind* will be easier if you know the terrain better.

The Hind leading the Hind

Once you're in flight, you have three priorities, in order of importance: 1) stay alive, 2) accomplish your objective, and 3) ignore anything that doesn't interfere with #1 or #2. Unlike other flight sims, there are no points in *Hind*, so there's no reason to rack up a bunch of kills. If it's not at waypoint X, Y, or Z, and if it's not a threat to you, there's no reason to waste time and ordnance shooting at it. And if it is a threat to you, you're just as well off running away as you are killing it. This puts an emphasis on defensive flying, where the motto is, "safety in numbers." Stick with your wingmen, because not only will they help you eliminate threats, but they'll also draw fire which might otherwise be aimed at you. If necessary, slow down and wait for your wingmen to catch up with you. By making use of the "Follow Me" command <Shift-2> and the "Follow Flight Plan" command <Shift-4>, you can keep your wingmen close at hand or send them ahead to clear a path. Note that the "Follow Me" command will let you make impromptu adjustments to the flight plan, as your wingmen ignore their waypoints when they've been ordered to follow you.

While you're in flight, it's prudent to cycle occasionally through targets using the backspace key. The Silicon WSO's target priority is hard-coded into each mission, and can change as you approach certain waypoints. Although target priority is normally based on which target is the most immediate threat, a waypoint with a mission objective might draw the WSO's attention away from more lethal air threats. This is all the more reason to make sure your wingmen are close and to double check an objective area by cycling through targets up until the last minute.

[1]Safety in Numbers: the "Follow Me" command will keep you and your wingmen in a tight formation like this; [2]Gun Bait: clusters of units like these are perfect for the Hind's turret gun; [3]Death Dot: the Continuously Computed Impact Point makes manual bombing easier than using the Silicon WSO

Uncle SAM wants you

Among the various ground threats, SAMs are the most lethal. Flying fast and low will keep you safe from most missile attacks, but don't hesitate to let loose with a Shturm if you manage to lase a SAM in your flight path inadvertently. AAA units in your way are more easily thwarted by flying at an angle (as opposed to head-on) and leaving them to your chin gun once you get within range. The most potent threat, because it's not as easy to outrun, is enemy airpower. Never ignore enemy Hinds or Apaches if you can't immediately outrun them, because they will not go away. Consider making an occasional Crazy Ivan, a 360 degree turn to check your six for unseen air threats. Natasha will call out the most threatening contact every ten seconds, but her idea of "threatening" may not always coincide with yours.

When you come upon a cluster of enemy units, you have to decide whether to commit to attacking them or to running away. If you're going to stick around and shoot at targets which aren't part of your objective, you're just going to slow down and open yourself to attacks over a longer period of time. Considering that your countermeasures have a limited lifespan (about three minutes' worth of chaff and one-and-a-half minutes' worth of flares; double this if you take the time to land and reload), it's rarely wise to go out of your way to attack targets. You'll need every available second of chaff and flares for your target areas, with a healthy margin for error in the event you stumble across enemy air power.

The red rocket's glare

As for acquiring targets, don't try to take over the WSO's job while flying. It's just not feasible to hunt down and designate distant targets from the Hind's nose while you're in a combat situation. The WSO's station is useful for its unobstructed view, especially when manually delivering bombs and rockets. When firing rockets (or cannons, which are basically pods of 250 23mm rockets), turn off the Silicon WSO, go to his station, and keep one finger on the <T> key to designate tar-

[1]Bomb's Eye View: the F7 key gives you a closer look at how accurate your bomb release is;[2]Pouring It On: feel free to apply rockets liberally since they come in large packages

gets immediately in front of you. Alternatively, you can turn off targeting completely and "guesstimate" the impact point. Wild firing even pays off if you're aiming at larger targets like buildings. However you finesse it, manual targeting is easiest, as you won't have to turn the Hind as violently as you would chasing down whatever targets the WSO picked out for you. And remember that rockets come in big packages, so fire liberally.

Another place where the Silicon WSO should be switched off is with bombs. Unless you can line up a perfect shot, the computer is likely to get picky about releasing weapons. Since bombs have a generous area of effect, near misses are often acceptable. Also the CCIP (aka "death dot"), makes it extremely easy to see where you'll hit. This makes drops in the middle of a cluster of units particularly easy. When practicing, use the F7 key to follow your bombs down and see how close you get to your target. Since bombs and rockets are unguided weapons, you can practice them on your own air base once you get tired of flying way out to Waypoint X in the training missions.

Shturm n' burn

The Shturm is by far the easiest weapon to use. Be sure there are cross hairs on your aiming reticule before firing. If you acquire a target and then duck down behind a hill, you can waste Shturms in the dirt. Shturms are great for ripple firing, as long as you leave a second or two between shots for the WSO to acquire a new target. The maximum load of eight Shturms may not seem like many, but don't forget that you have eight more stowed inside, ready to be reloaded if you touch down for a moment. Shturms are also effective against enemy helicopters. They're not as nimble as the air-to-air R60s, but if you can set up a head-on or rear quarter firing solution, they pack a considerably larger whallop.

Although Digital Integration has toned down their love affair with the turret gun since Apache's god-like 30mm chain gun, the Hind's gun is immune to jamming. If you're closing on a cluster of targets, don't let up on the trigger until they're all down. The Silicon WSO will switch targets quickly enough so that scarcely a round is wasted. Besides, with 1,470 rounds (double that with a reload), there's more than enough ammo, so don't be stingy: there's plenty to go around.

Successful use of the Hind in combat boils down to focusing on your objective despite distractions. Your three priorities are worth reiterating: 1) stay alive, 2) accomplish your objective, and 3) ignore everything that doesn't interfere with #1 and #2. The Russian military has put together a durable and versatile aircraft with which to do this. Use it well, because a Hind is a terrible thing to waste. *–Tom Chick*

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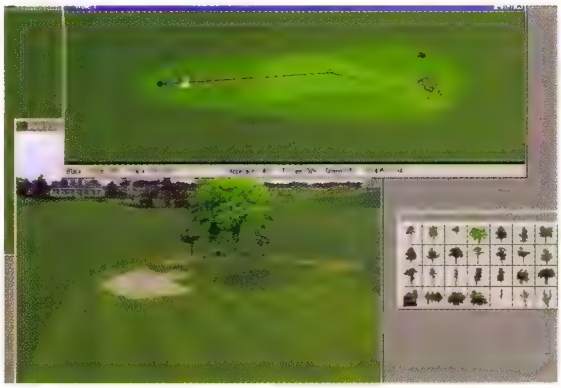
Jack's back, drivin' to the hoop for a first down

Preview: Jack Nicklaus 4 — Accolade — Windows 95

"Another golf game," you say?

Wait until you see what Accolade's *Jack Nicklaus 4* brings to the table: a powerful course designer. Recently, Maxis took a stab at it with *SimGolf*, and while the course designer there worked quite nicely, Maxis solved the graphics problem by going retro, with graphics reminiscent of those 8- and early 16-bit games. Simply put, the course designer in *Jack Nicklaus 4* blows away the one in *SimGolf*. Whereas that game includes three tutorials that are required reading, a few minutes of futzing about with the *Nicklaus* designer will have you well on your way to your first course. A "wizard" lets you enter the par and yardage of each hole, plus dog-leg information (i.e. dogleft left, 15 degrees), and then generates the holes for you. Thereafter, it's a matter of simply arranging them on the course, and *voilá:* a playable 18 hole course.

It's off the pin! Great shots can be saved for later bragging



You do the actual hole building in the drawn overhead window, but the rendered window is updated in realtime as you make changes. Terrific!

The fun comes in building in the challenges. Add bunkers and hazards, shape the greens, raise and lower land and alter the sky and backgrounds. It's all quite easy to do, yet you won't feel hampered by the software. As easy as it is to use, it is also quite powerful. While you shape each hole individually in an overhead drawn mode, you can open a "rendered" window to see things from a player's eye view. Once the course is complete, you add the icing: cart paths, benches… even sound effects.

The basic golf engine looks quite capable. The 16-bit color graphics are *close* to those of *Links LS*. The swing meter provided allows you to tweak how hard you want to hit the ball, a quality feature previously seen only in Lyriq's *Picture Perfect Golf*. As for variety, the game already has five courses and seven kinds of games in place. An old favorite, Bingo Bango Bongo, even makes an appearance. The interface supports computer golfers (though none are included yet) as well as network play.

Here's our funky first hole being played

All told, *Jack Nicklaus 4*, may be the package which finally gives *Links LS* a run for its money. Accolade plans to release the Course Designer module as a demo for the game (included on this month's CD). Imagine the courses that will be created once *that* hits the Internet. By the time the final game is out, the 'net should be full of downloadable courses. Computer golf fans should keep an eye on this one. –*Peter Smith*

Preview: NCAA Basketball: Final Four 97 — Mindscape Sports Alternative — Windows 95

Mindscape's new sports division has EA Sports' basketball crown in their sights, with *NCAA Basketball: Final Four 97*, an already impressive looking and playing high-flying basketball game. Though it lacks the management and career modes of GTE's *NCAA Championship Basketball, Final Four 97* has all the moves necessary to be potentially one of the best playing basketball games on the market.

In typical modern fashion, the entire game is 3D. The players are polygonal, just like those in *NBA Live 97*, and the animation throughout is excellent, with size variations for all of the players (but no refs). MSA is promising over 50 dunk animations, and a couple of weeks of solid play would seem to verify that claim. There are also animations of players getting knocked over when fouled, but the game, in alpha form, is still missing a few. Players back in on offense, make swipes at the ball on defense, and set picks at the top of the key.

Though the playing of the game is receiving most of the attention (it supports four buttons on a gamepad), AI and play-calling is also receiving plenty of attention. The only thing missing from this build of the game is, unfortunately, the AI. Right now, it's too easy to score and to steal, but the players seem to

Mr. Polygon takes a jump shot from 15... he shoots, he scores, baby

move around the key accurately, and most of the offensive and defensive formations, which can be assigned to function keys, are in place. There are a number of plays to choose from, from high posts and triangles to zones and presses.

With an impressive feature set, subtly flashy menus (utilizing background full-motion video – a good idea that's well implemented) and excellent visuals throughout, *Final Four 97* has the potential to be a slam dunk when it's released during March Madness. *–Steve Bauman*

High-flying, in your face dunks like this are common in Final Four 97

Review

Front Page Sports Football Pro '97

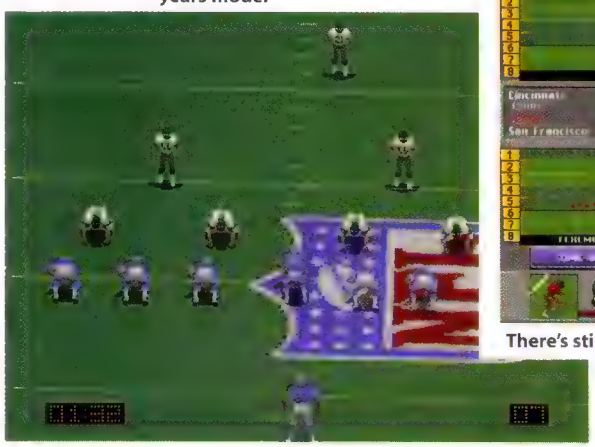
Sierra ★★½★★ Windows 95

All of the major sports game publishers have fallen into the trap of rolling out a new release every year (in the old days, they'd actually release data disks with new rosters). EA Sports has been successful by taking the visual improvement route, with each release showing incredible gains in presentation (netting them a lot of good reviews from people who ignore the same-y gameplay). Sierra has taken a more subtle route, and issued incremental improvements to their *Front Page Sports* line of games. The *Baseball 96* model was two years late, and was predominantly a Windows 95 conversion, but most of the bugs which plagued the first version remained, and so many new ones were introduced that the game was only partially salvaged by its rich feature set.

The *Football* line, which shares the rich features and complex design of the *Baseball* series, peaked with *Football Pro '94*. It has seen only minor improvements the last three releases; high-resolution graphics in 1996 and a Windows 95 conversion for 97. It's not enough.

Football Pro '97 has all of the hallmarks of a rushed release; fatal crash bugs, weird database glitches, no integration between different elements of the game (the play editor, in particular, looks like it was traded from another game), carryover graphics from the previous model and the same clunky interface (made even more glaring by the fact it refuses to conform to most Windows input specifications, much to its detriment). It remains the most ambitious and feature-rich football game on the market; however, it's getting harder to ignore its many problems.

Aside fromthe player numbers on the back of the uniforms, you'd be hard-pressed to tell this from last years model

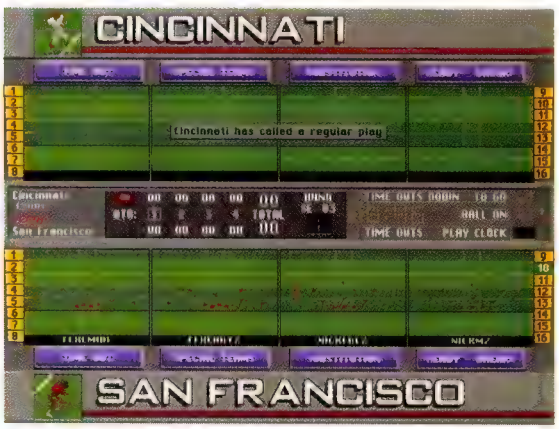


The Lions line up in a single back offense, with the god-like Barry Sanders ready to send linebackers to an early retirement

The main problem – and it's shared across the entire *Front Page Sports* line – is that the wealth of features only work at about a 90% level. That extra 10% is never given any attention, probably because of the legacy of carrying over five year old programming code (or because a bug-free stat model doesn't sound very sexy in an ad). A rewrite of the entire program would go a long way toward fixing such lingering problems, but that would probably force Sierra to miss a year, which could prove disastrous in the competitive sports market (look what happened with *Madden 96-97*).

Football Pro '97 is also starting to show its age in its graphic design. The players now have numbers, but that feature's been over-engineered. They shadow properly and bend and fold with the player sprite, which is fine, but another couple of frames of animation would have been a better use for left-over CPU cycles. The animation is pretty good, though there are still no left-handed quarterbacks, and players tend to flip too often. The actual fields look particularly bland and blocky (it looks like the textures used on the field are carryovers from the 1994 version).

The game's strength has always been the career mode, which makes it a bit harder to embrace the new network play as the Second Coming. Controlling a team for over the course of 10-15 years is the way to go, and any wanna-be Jimmy Johnson can trash a team and build it from the ground up. Unfortunately, on more than one occasion, the game would substitute a different team in the stat round-up, failing to record any stats for the real team in the game (technicall invalidating the entire year's worth of stats). A number of other crashes were experienced when simulating a week's worth of games (they occurred as the stats were being written out).



There's still no visual or aural feedback when selecting a play

The new play editor is quite powerful, and fairly easy to use, though a simpler coaching profile editor would be appreciated. Unfortunately, the editor is a bit slow to get in and out of (it's a separate program). You can try your plays in practice mode, but the game takes probably three or four minutes to re-load the main program and call

Tackle animations are so good they hurt - ouch

up the graphics (how about just using X's and O's directly in the editor? Most people just want to make sure people aren't running into one another and that things are moving smoothly).

Generally, if you don't own a previous Sierra football game, there's no question that this is still the best all-around football game on the market, mostly because this year's models have been fairly mediocre. If you're thinking of upgrading, though, it's hard to get too excited by this release. The previous version looked and played identically, lacking only a native Windows 95 version (and those exciting player numbers).

Unfortunately, all of the problems that in the past could be overlooked because of the wealth of features are starting to add up, and the entire game is starting to age rapidly. It's time for Sierra to evaluate this product and decide if they want to fix it or risk alienating their fans with another rush job. We probably won't know for sure until *Front Page Sports Football Pro '98*. *–Steve Bauman*

Review
Soccer
Microsoft
★★★★★
Windows 95

There's a definite art to creating a good game, but recent evidence suggests that Microsoft, even with all its size and clout, aren't the artisans their marketing would lead you to believe. *Soccer* is a prime example of how a product can look pretty good from the outset but self-destruct when you get to that little something called gameplay.

Realism? Forget it, baby. *Soccer* is just about as arcade as they come, with limited animation, virtually no dynamic difference between hard blasts and touch passes, and players which almost levitate across the field with little purpose and certainly without style. If you think you saw a particular action or series of actions just a few moments ago, you probably did. And you undoubtedly will again, in short order.

But wait, it gets worse.

Unlike most sports games, where the ball carrier will not act without instructions from the gamer, the man in possession of the *Soccer* ball will kick or pass or run as the software deems appropriate at the time. So if you haven't chosen the right player *before* he gets the ball (a near impossibility due to the speed of the game *and* the slug-like gamepad-to-screen response time), you're out of luck.

You're also out of luck when players run right over the top of the ball without picking it up. Of course, other players may chase the ball out of bounds then become caught in an endless loop of dribbling against a grandstand wall, so it kind of evens out.

Soccer features just a single viewer perspective (3/4 corner), no commentary or replay, and though player skill modifications are permitted in what is a decent customization menu, they're certainly not reflected on the pitch. As mentioned earlier, the game actually looks pretty fair (now, don't go getting visions of *FIFA 97* in your head), but that lone saving grace will be of little consolation to anyone who's actually played the thing. If you're anything like me, you'll be left wondering how a game this wrong and unexciting escaped in the first place. *–Gordon Goble*

"Kick him in the head, kick him in the head"

Review
SimGolf
Maxis
★★★★★
Windows 95

Maxis never has followed the crowd. Access has Arny, Accolade has Jack and Groliers went with Greg. Did Maxis sign on a player? Nope. They went with a course designer, Robert Trent Jones, Jr, to be the talking head in their product.

This is only one way *SimGolf* tries to differentiate itself from the pack. Rather than the click-click-click of a swing meter, *SimGolf* uses the MouseSwing. By sliding the mouse back and forth, you replicate the swing of the club. On Beginner level it's easier than swing meters ever were. On Pro level, it's damned difficult. For you traditionalists out there, an old fashioned swing meter is hidden in the program.

The gameplay problems all stem from what isn't there. The graphics are sub-par, the physics rigid (*every* iron shot kicks back, no matter that you gave the ball a huge topspin), no options are provided for adjusting stance, and there's no "lie" illustration. Your current lie is described only at the end of the previous shot. Once you click "continue," it's lost. Since the graphics differentiate fairway, green, and rough by subtle shadings of green only, it can be a real problem determining your exact location.

Built-in Internet play means you can challenge anyone out there in cyberspace (which is a good thing, since there are no computer opponents), and two included courses will get you going, though presumably the 'net will soon be filled with player-created courses via the included course editor.

Maxis fans will feel way more at home in the editor. In typical *Sim* style, there's an initial learning curve, after which you think you know everything, but as you poke around in the designer's innards you find more and more complexity. Frankly, tinkering with the course designer is a lot more fun than playing the game.

Overall, for serious golfers there're way too many corners cut to satisfy. If the course designer intrigues you, it might be worth it to wait for Accolade's *Jack Nicklaus Golf 4*. If you just want to play golf, then *Links LS* is still at the top of the heap. *–Peter Smith*

The sub-par SimGolf (or would you describe a golf game as being above par?)

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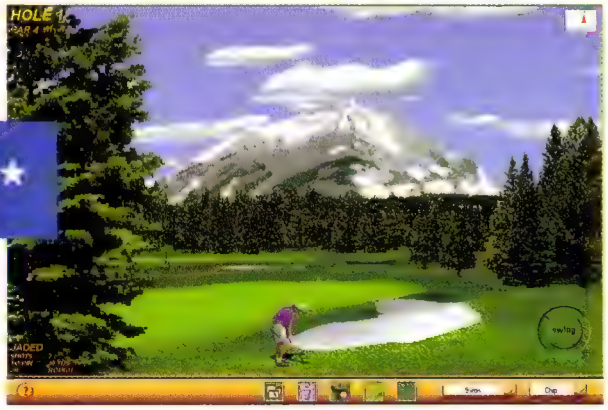
Review

Golf 3.0

Microsoft ★★★★★ Windows 95

Note the 3.0 in the title. This isn't a sequel, it's a major upgrade. *Golf 3.0* is still based on the *Links 386* gaming engine. The two most significant enhancements in this version are the instant screen redraws (using Windows 95's multithreading capability, the program is rendering the next screen while you're watching the current one) and, after applying a patch found on the Microsoft home page, Internet play via Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone.



It's more golf. Looks like Links. It is Links. Only it's from Microsoft

If the Internet isn't your bag, you can play against friends over a LAN, play against recorded players, or against computer players. Computer players can be customized by setting various attributes, such as putting skill, aggressiveness, and so on. A variety of sound libraries is available, though most are pretty weak (the Comedy library isn't funny, the Attitude library is). Two courses (Harbor Town and Banff Springs) come with the game, and you can convert *Links 386* courses. Several styles of play (stroke play, best ball, etc.) help the game to "get legs." Enough enhancements are included to warrant a re-purchase if you're still happy with circa-*Links 386* graphics and gameplay. This is starting to sound like a broken record, but serious golfers will want to go with *Links LS*.

It's worth mentioning that *Golf 3.0* suffers from a "familiarity breeds contempt" curse. If you're new to computer golfing, this is a worthwhile investment. You old dogs though... you've seen most of this before. *–Peter Smith*

Review

Monday Night Football

ABC Interactive ★★★★★ Windows 95

It all starts with that song. It burrows into your skull. It won't leave, though you wish it would. You hate it, but you can't forget it.

Yeah yeah, we're ready for some football, Hank. So shut up and bring it on...

MicroProse's *Ultimate Football* is back (with some multimedia trappings) as *Monday Night Football*, an ultimately dissatisfying but focused football simulation. While it delivers unparalleled control over formations and audibles, it falls down with technical glitches, incredibly bad performance, poor on-field visuals, a mediocre computer AI and lacks the league and player control features of its more mature competitor, the *Front Page Sports* line.

First impressions of the game are extremely negative. The shell interface for setting up your game is overdesigned, and performs poorly. While the TV control room looks good, it streams multiple videos from your CD-ROM in different computer monitors, which slows the game down enough to cause mouse clicks to take 5-10 seconds to register.

Monday Night Football's players look odd when running, like they haven't fully evolved and are almost dragging their knuckles on the ground

Did I mention before that Barry Sanders is god-like? Here's the play calling interface – the best in the biz

Just selecting teams for a "quick" game can take minutes, rather than seconds, and doesn't encourage you to fire this one up just to play a game.

Gamers interested in playing, rather than coaching, would be well-advised to steer clear of this one. An arcade mode is available, but is curiously undocumented (which probably says more about its quality, or lack thereof, than anything). However, the coaching mode, and in particular the play-calling, is where this game truly shines. It has, bar none, the most powerful play caller in the business. You can design plays during the game and save them to your playbook, which allows you to make on-field adjustments.

A play editor with a slick interface is also included, though you cannot execute the plays in a simulated environment from the editor. You can script plays much like Bill Walsh did when he was with the 49'ers. Custom playbooks have been created for each team.

While the play design and calling is superb, the AI can't compete. Teams which spread the defense with a lot of offensive weapons (like the 49'ers or Lions) can rack up 500 yards of offense easily. Players always complain about AI in football games, but as this game makes clear, it's easier to give the player control of an offense than to create a generic AI to contain them. However, the game supports DirectPlay for multiplayer games, either modem-to-modem, via a LAN, or over the Internet.

A number of technical problems crop up in the game. Out of the box it supports Direct3D, but is incompatible with both the 3DFx chipset and the Stealth 3D (the 3DFx inexplicably cannot do Windows dialog boxes, which the game uses for the play calling, and the Stealth3D doesn't display textures properly). It's an incredible performance hog, requiring a top-speed PC without really giving the player the visual kick such requirements mandate.

Here's a good idea for an interface. Unfortunately, it's slower than a lineman on a 90 yard TD run

The production values are quite high throughout, with a play-by-play by Michaels, Gifford and Dierdorf that is entertaining enough to actually leave on. But no one plays a football game to listen to the commentary. When all is said and done, *Monday Night Football* is an ambitious game in need of a lot more development to be competitive. *–Steve Bauman*

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What does "Cheezowie" mean?

Find the answer at www.castleinfinity.com

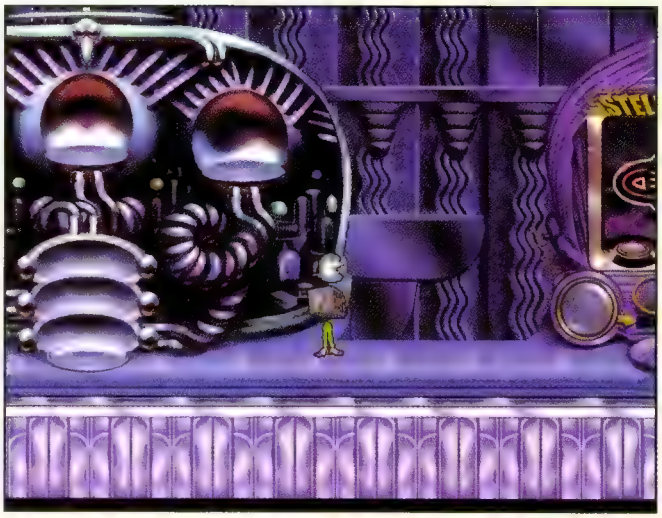
Here at *Computer Games Strategy Plus*, we have a golden rule for reviewing games: *Review each game fairly, except those games with the word "Cheezowie" printed on the box. These games automatically receive zero stars.*

It's a good rule, and normally I agree with it–but in this case I feel obliged to break it. Yes, Starwave's *Castle Infinity* does indeed have the word "Cheezowie" prominently displayed on the box, but we'll forgive it just this once, because it's a mighty good children's game.

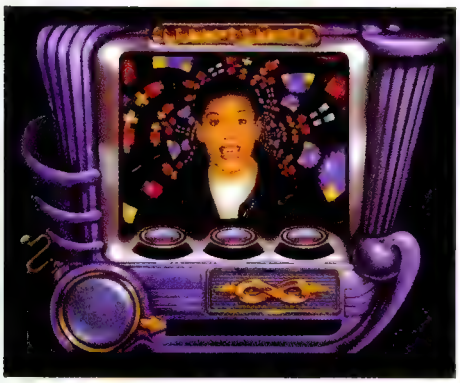
The game's premise is delightfully nonsensical: long ago, humans, dinosaurs and monsters (yes, monsters) coexisted peacefully. But trust those monsters to screw things up! They contrived for a comet to strike the earth and wipe out the humans and dinosaurs. (Of course, it also wiped out the monsters. Silly monsters.)

The dinosaurs, showing characteristic dinosaur foresight, built a castle to hide in. But a few monsters snuck in as well, and now the dinosaurs are actively recruiting children to help them with their monster problem.

Castle Infinity is a Windows 95 game that requires Internet access. It's essentially an action-adventure game, but with a bit of educational value and a lot of room for creativity. The extra wrinkle is that kids play this game on-line, so they can interact with other kids. Of course, this begs the question: do you *really* want your children tying up the phone line all night?



If only my room looked this good in real life



This is Stella, your digitized guide to Castle Infinity

Kids can mix and match cartoon-ish body parts to build an in-game persona, store items in their personal room, and even send or receive "postcards" (e-mail) with friends. Some of the game's locales seem a bit vacant, but others are replete with danger and interaction, and there's a strong emphasis on exploration and experimentation. Graphics and sound are uniformly great.

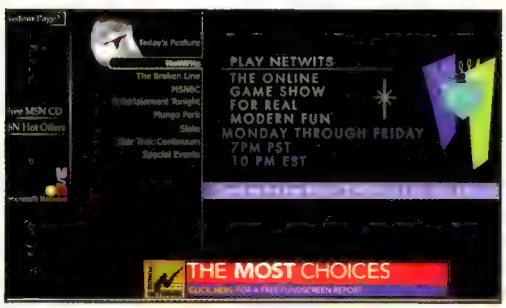
Castle Infinity is easy to install, and even includes Netscape Navigator and a free month of Internet access though Netcom, so it truly is an all-in-one package. Furthermore, there is no cost beyond the purchase of the game (and your Internet provider), so you needn't worry about your kids racking up monstrous service charges. Find out more at **www.castleinfinity.com**. *–Joe Grant Bell*

You NetWit

What the world needs is an interactive game show

The Microsoft Network (MSN to its closest friends) is the future of online entertainment. Before you fire off your first nasty letter, consider that it's the closest any online site has come to being true interactive TV on the web. With enough visual flash to keep people from clicking away and original content that's varied and professional, it's state-of-the-art online entertainment.

Its latest program is *NetWits*, a nightly game show hosted by Vic Marvelous, which brings together thousands of online contestants to compete for prizes. First prize is a round trip airline ticket to anywhere within the United States, while second and third prize are official *NetWits* products (a "Party Lampshade" and a t-shirt).



Head on down to ye olde Microsoft Network for fun

The game is broken down into different gaming categories per night. Monday features "Crosswords," where people compete to find the longest word in a scrambled grid of letter; Tuesday is "Top of the Mark," where players try to get to the top of a triangle; Wednesday is "Push-Your-Luck," a maze game; Thursday is "I Challenge That," a variant of paper, rock, scissors; and Friday is "Switcheroo," a riddle game.

To play the game, you'll have to install the software from the MSN preview CD-ROM (available online or by calling 800-FREE-MSN). Players can log on up to a half an hour early and chat with each other (how many game shows start with people saying, "are you naked?"), and the chat continues after the game is over.

The game takes place at 7pm PST (10pm EST) and can be found by pointing your browser to **www.msn.com**. *– Steve Bauman*

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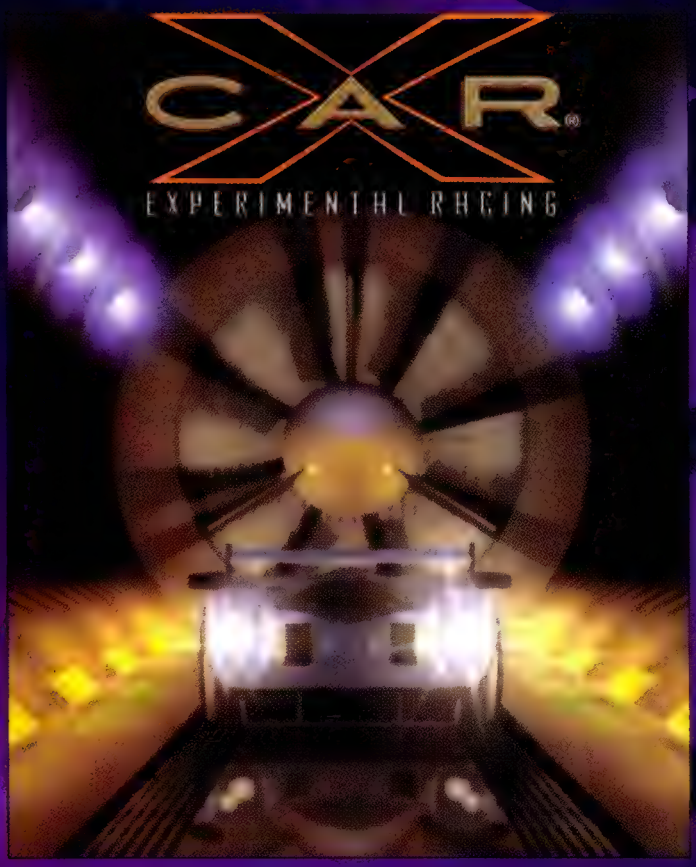

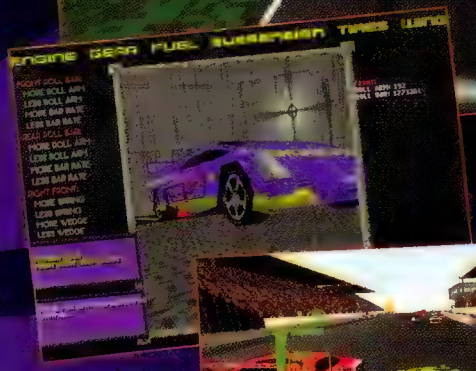

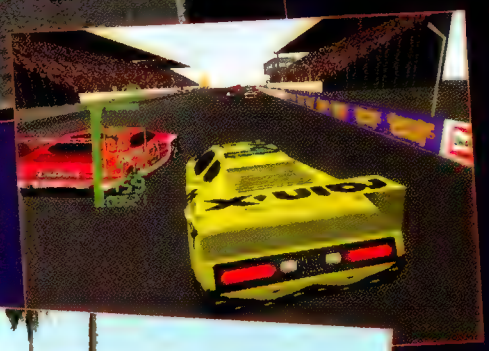

Actual IBM screens shown

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The jagged edge

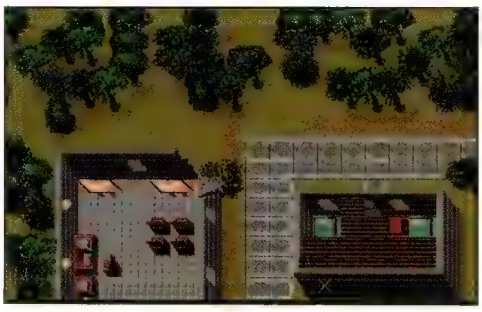
Tactics for Sirtech's multiplayer Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games

It may not be Metavira, but the solo campaign in *Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games* is a great way to reacquaint yourself with the joys of mercenary mayhem. On its own the *Deadly Games* campaign is great fun, but it's also great as preparation for multi-player carnage. *Deadly Games* is *deadlier* than its predecessor, and there's enough to make veterans of *Jagged Alliance* take notice. Nearly everything you learned playing *Jagged Alliance* is still valuable, but there are many new things to learn, and some new toys to play with.

Arming for battle

Most of the new weapons in *Deadly Games* are self-explanatory. The Uzi functions just like a 9mm pistol. The .44 magnum acts like a bigger .357. And the chainsaw… well, besides cutting (slowly) through obstructing foliage, if you can get close enough to a foe, you've got one big knife there, mate. Uzis are fine for stealth missions silenced; modified Uzis hit hard and fire fast, and thus are excellent up close. The big Redhawk .44 packs a wallop, but is inaccurate; great for combat medics. You can modify a .44 for more power, but it's generally a waste of steel (unless you need a powerful silenced weapon).

The mortar and the grenade launcher are the most interesting novelties. Most important is the grenade launcher, which lobs standard hand grenades (all types) farther than you can throw. Line of sight only, it can be dangerous in heavy cover, but nothing beats it for long-range destruction. Grenades are common, and the launchers show up here and there; by mid-game you should be toting some around. They're necessary when you face hordes of tough bad guys, all of whom are armored head to toe. Pop out from behind cover, lob a grenade into a group of bad guys, and duck behind a tree; it's a dance step that beats the macarena any day of the week.



Mortars—urban renewal the old fashioned way

The mortar is fun, but fickle. It's hard to find a mortar in really good shape. Save before firing a shoddy mortar. If it fails, restore and try again. Once you get it to shoot, you have a hugely destructive weapon – if you can hit anything. Though real mortars are famed for indirect fire, in *Deadly Games* you're better off with a clear line of sight; otherwise, you're more likely to kill your mercs than the enemy. Use mortars when the enemy congregates obligingly in a large group, preferably well away from friendly forces. You can also blast holes in buildings this way, but good luck hitting where you aim.

Tactics

In the field, some basic tactics should become second nature. First, match mercs and weapons carefully. Mercs with high marksmanship should get accurate, long range weapons, while those with less accuracy should get the big pistols. Junk the basic .38 ASAP, as it's nearly worthless against armored foes. The sharpshooters should lag behind, to cover a wider field of fire and to provide cover; it isn't as important for marksmen to have excellent action point (AP) allowances if you use them as fire bases. Mercs with average skills but excellent AP totals are still more versatile than those with one or two superb skill ratings but mediocre APs; four aimed shots with an Uzi can sometimes be more devastating than two from a rifle. For sharpshooters, however, use maximum aim unless in an emergency situation, as it is far better to kill than to wound in *Deadly Games*. With time limits often crucial, you have to kill the enemy *now*; no better way to do that than by hitting them with well-aimed rifle shots.

Even with normal equipment, Spam is a lot more than just potted meat

When attacking, you have to decide between two tactics: rush the enemy, or snipe them. Rushing means moving up and blasting away all your APs; you have to have more than one merc in position to do this effectively. The first merc walks up, fires until APs are gone, then the next merc does the same, until the target is dead. If you snipe, you will pop out from behind cover, fire once at max aim, then duck back into cover. You can do this with just one merc, though you won't be likely to do much harm. If several mercs do this, though, you can often kill without retaliation. Usually, rushing the enemy is necessary when you are on the offensive, while a sniping approach is viable when on the defensive. Of course, the best way to kill the enemy is to lob high explosives at them when they are bunched up. This often sets up an easy rush situation.

Dealing with structures

Several missions require assaulting defended structures. They're difficult. My advice? Cheat. Where possible, use explosives. TNT and plastic make wonderful doors. To be effective, though, you have to do some recon. The less honorable but quite effective solution is to run the scenario once as a recon mission, with every intention of restoring to an earlier save. Find out where you can place a charge on the building to blow a passable entryway; remember that blowing a wall right next to a book case or other obstruction won't get you into the building. Have a fast merc place the bomb, then run like the dickens. The rest of the team should be in position to fire into the new doorway. This approach obviates the need to go through the (heavily guarded) front door. Remember that on normal delay, the bomb goes off next turn; you get one more turn with extended fuses. All mercs within about four squares are vulnerable to damage from a bomb.

Of course, sometimes you have to clear the building the old fashioned way. A grenade from a distance makes a dandy door opener; failing that, shoot the door open from a distance. Never simply open the door; you're courting death if you do. Position mercs to cover the door and nearby windows, blast the door, then send in your assault team. Use mercs with enough APs to move, fire, and get out of the way. Try to hit buildings from more than one side if possible; this splits the defenders, and your assault teams can sometimes offer mutual support.

Defending a building is much easier. It's often best to sit back in the building, out of the line of sight of windows, watching the doors. When the bad guys enter, kill them. The red shirts will pile through the doorway like lemmings. Limit your exposure by forcing the enemy to come to you. One note of caution: in multi-player mode, the enemy will use explosives to blast a way in; in that case, you will have to be much more aggressive in covering the approaches to your little love nest by sniping from the windows.

There's more, of course, but this should get you started on your own deadly games. Good hunting. – *Robert Mayer*

Run Like Hell

Letter of the month

I would like to make a comment on game realism in the wargame genre, which seems to be quite a subject these days. Every time I read a review, an editorial, or a write-in which comments on the realism of a game, it reminds me just how far the gaming world has gone from the basic concept of...gaming. Games are supposed to be for fun – and that's all. Whether you have a learning experience or not is beside the point. What is important is that anyone who plays a game enjoys it strictly for the sake of the game and any challenges it may pose.

Unfortunately, I am finding more and more gaming software being reviewed and treated like the business software I use and design each day. Comments and reviews tear the poor things apart like discussions on the latest features of a new compiler or design tool. And that is just plain sad.

For those who enjoy the intricacies of a challenge with a horde of statistics, like the games from HPS Simulations, I say, give them as much as they can handle. But for a lot of us in the working world, a long hard day is not going to encourage us to sit down and knock our brains out against a complex AI challenge. There has to be something more in the middle for the casual gamer who still wants to experience a challenge without having to die mentally in the process. This very desire is what gave rise to the immense popularity of *Doom* and its clones in the adult world. It is simple to play, with a maze challenge to boot, and is just plain fun.

Wargaming is being taken to new levels of complexity not because the game actually requires it but mostly as a result of what a computer can do. But consider the immense popularity of SSI's 5-Star series. They are simple but elegant. And this is what the old popular board games used to be; simple, enjoyable, and something of a learning experience. And the "grognards" were still happy.

I think today we have to take a very serious look at what one is trying to accomplish when a new wargame is introduced. Are we trying for reality or for the fun of it? Avalon Hill became popular for the fun of it; maybe the new games should try for the same thing.

Games are and have always been just exercises in fantasy and escapism; with today's stressed out world, we could use a lot more of that.

Steve Naidamast
via the Internet

Better than they were

Hi, I subscribe to *CGS+* and really enjoy the magazine. Something which concerns me is that you sometimes review a game which was released too soon. The game is buggy and gets a bad review. Then months later, patches are provided by the game designer and voilà - the game is great. Unfortunately, no one realizes it, because the original review blasted it.

One example of a mediocre game that is now really good is *Conquest of the New World - Deluxe Edition*. It would be nice if your magazine would review the latest version and comment on the improvements since the original release.

I think more people would be interested in the game if they played the latest version.

Mike Jaffee
via the Internet

A couple of issues here. First and foremost from our perspective is that we don't like to encourage "early releases" – i.e. games which arrive buggy and incomplete. Giving publishers the comfort of knowing they'll get follow-up coverage once a game's been patched would only help open the door to making this common practice. Secondly, new games just out always get preference over follow-up on older titles in our pages; that's just a fact of life. Thanks for your comments!

As an example of a game that arrived buggy and incomplete, we bring you the continuing saga of....

Battlecruiser 3000 AD

I was particularly impressed by Tom Chick's balanced review of *Battlecriuser 3000 AD*. From a viewpoint of being able to run this game straight out of the box, it fails big time.

I will tell you, however, I am a fan of this game, and I believe in both Take 2 and Dr. Smart's vision to fix this game.

Dr. Smart plans on releasing a third patch he believes will fix most of the problems. His fourth patch will be just before version 1.1, and I believe Take 2 will attempt to republish a new and improved version stable enough for anyone.

I encourage you to allow Mr. Chick an opportunity to review the next version of *Battlecruiser* (which I believe will be sometime during 1st quarter '97) to see just how close Dr. Smart and Take 2 can come to the vision.

Victor T. Edwards
via the Internet

We are on top of developments here, and will keep our readers informed should anything significant happen; however, it's unlikely we'll go to a full-scale re-review of the game, due in part to the reasons specified in the previous letter. – ed.

CPU patrol

I am a subscriber to your fine magazine, and wanted to ask you a question. I am considering buying a new system, and was wondering whether to get a P5 200MHz or go to a P6 200MHz system. I've heard some DOS and 16-bit programs don't run as well on a P6. I have also heard that if you get a dual P6 board and later a second CPU, you have to run Windows NT. Is this true and what would that mean as far as gaming?

Steve Haney
Reedley, CA

Right now dual P-Pro boards are a total waste for gaming, since DOS and Windows 95 do not support multiple processors. UNIX and NT current support them, and NT is not a good OS for entertainment software, due to its security features and only occasional support for Microsoft's own DirectX drivers.

On the other hand, the reports of measly DOS/16-bit performance for the P6 are wrong, too (if you get an Intel 440FX "Natoma"-chipset based motherboard; the earlier "Orion" chipset was the culprit). Currently P6 chips are in short supply and thus at a premium. Don't try to get ahead of the cutting edge – a P5 200MHz is an optimal choice for the moment. – ed.

Poster mania

When I got my December issue of *CGS+*, I loved the *M.A.X.* poster that came with it. I considered the poster to be a "gift" from your company. Hence, I was surprised to find another poster in the January issue of the mag. I jumped so hard for joy I almost hurt myself in the hardest of places. *[?!]* But, nevertheless, I enjoyed the poster and hope to see many more. Thank you and keep up the good work!

Sendur Sellakumar
via internet

Thanks for the compliments. As for more posters, we'll have to see what the future holds. We have some other secret things in store for readers in '97, you can bet on that.

But please people, we ask that you not hurt yourselves with our magazine. We can't possibly live with that on our conscience. Be careful when you read – always useproper protection.– ed

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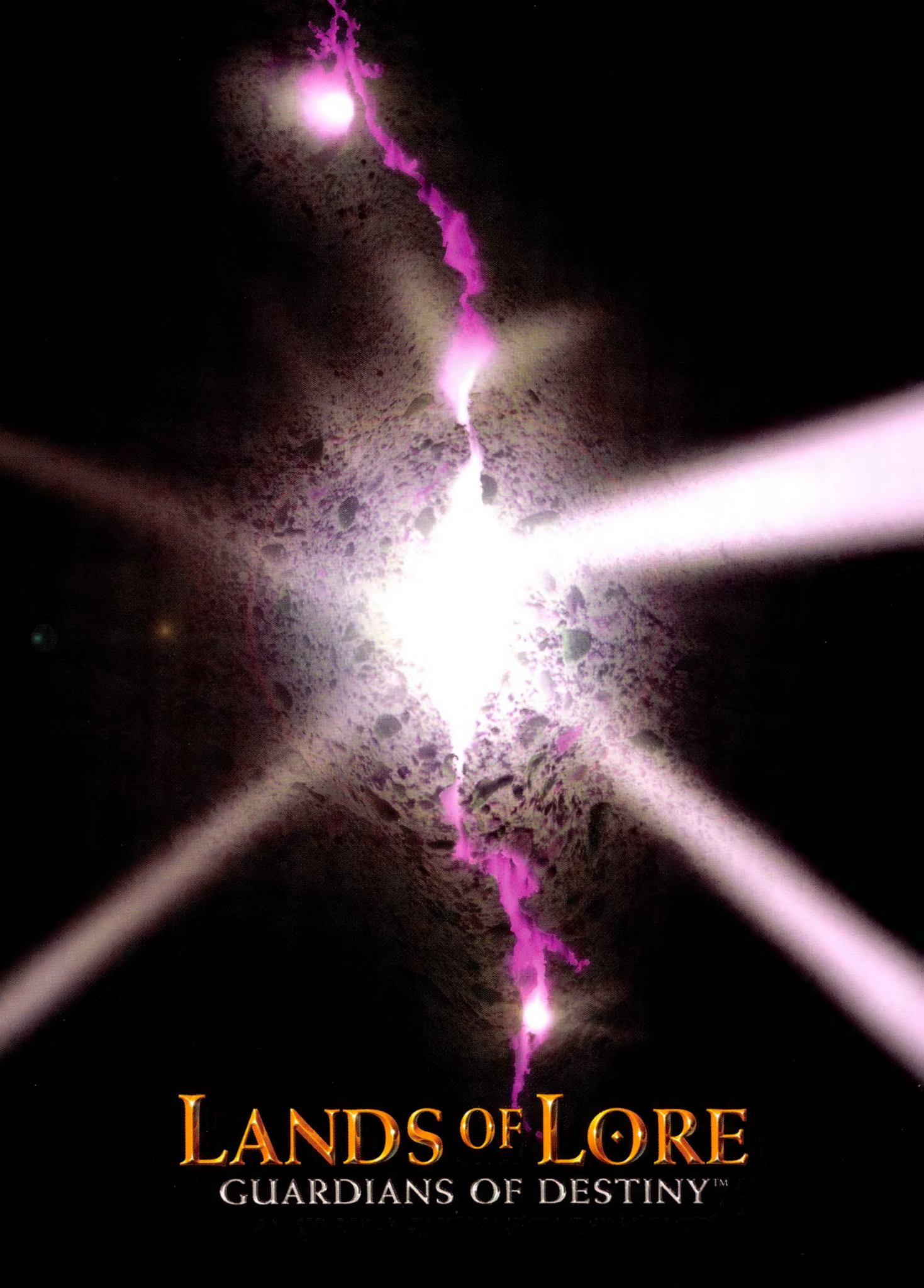
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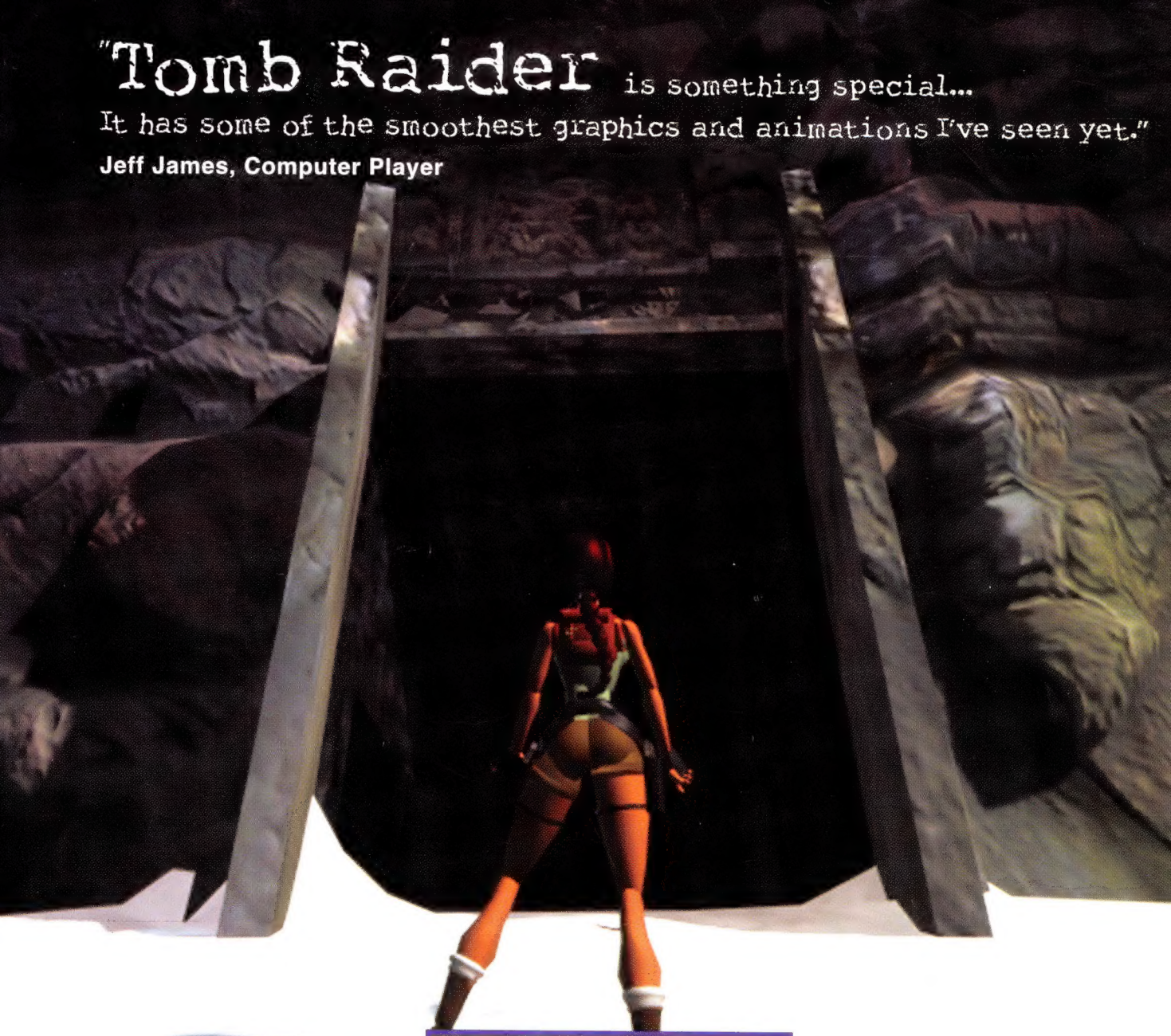
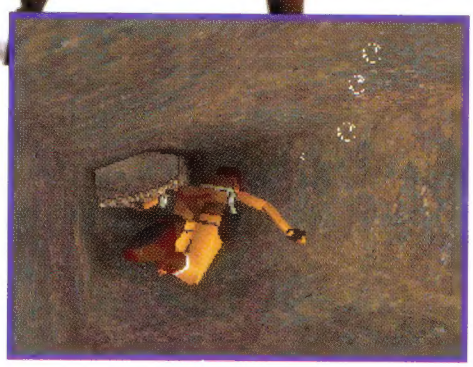
It has some of the smoothest graphics and animations I've seen yet."
Jeff James, Computer Player





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